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THE POSSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT
"FOR A MODERN CHRISTIAN

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Southern California
School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Religion

by
R. C. Brooks
June 1973

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This dissertation, written by

R. C. Brooks

*under the direction of his Faculty Committee,
and approved by its members, has been presented
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of
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requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF RELIGION

Faculty Committee

Ronald T. Brooks
Howard J. Chenebier Jr.

Date

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V. Thomas Trotter

PREFACE

The following pages have been distilled from the laboratory of my life. Through the months in which this writing took place, the concepts have been challenged frequently by friends and by Mary Kay. Each of them, in a personal way contributed to the development of this study. All of them searching with me for the fulfillment of meaning in life, they at times affirmed my interest in the institutional church and at other times challenged and criticized my understanding of it. The question of religious commitment was a recurring topic in the continuing debate which grew out of our common struggle. Through the benefit of those dialogues this writing has taken form. I have much appreciation for them all and especially for Mary Kay who shared all that this writing required of me.

I would like to add that because of the efforts women are making to be recognized as a part of the human community, I have become increasingly aware of the subtle chauvinism which permeates our thought and language. In the following pages therefore, conscious effort is made to liberate the manuscript in an attempt to affirm the humanity of both sexes.

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CHAPTER I

A GENERAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE MANUSCRIPT TO FOLLOW

A writer must justify a manuscript first of all to himself, but also to those who might read the finished copy. While, for the writer the process usually occurs in very personal and inexpressible ways, it is necessary to identify and label, as much as possible, the value of the manuscript for others. An attempt at this is made in this chapter as parameters are drawn around the chosen topic. The following introduction will acquaint the reader with the writer's intention.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Søren Kierkegaard's concern with the nominal Christian as the Church's worst enemy calls attention to the vacuous life, the limp spirit, the undefined commitment often found within the institutional church. The current malaise to be found there largely relates itself to the decline and failure of symbol systems, the presence of "broken symbols," as Tillich puts it, permeating Western culture and particularly our own society.

For the church this means the traditional rites and symbols no longer carry the meaning and significance of the past. The established method for expressing and confirming

a Christian commitment for many people is inadequate. The ritual of Baptism and the pledge of membership no longer give that sense of well being, that feeling of familial affiliation with God and man. More and more the symbolism involved fails to carry the power which justifies its existence in the mind of modern humanity. Robert Raines noted:

The greatest weakness of the modern church is its inability to bind and hold people together in concrete covenant. Such a mutual covenant is supposed to be embodied in church membership vows. But these vows though appropriately worded are usually unrelated to the empty discipleship which prevails. Thus concerned churchmen find it necessary to seek sustaining power in disciplines of Christian living like those formed at Kirkridge and Yokefellow retreat centers. One of the tasks for theologians in our day is to reform the norms of church membership which in fact are no longer normative.¹

The current ritual of religious commitment is not adequate expression for "*animal symbolicum*."

This creates a gap between the "official model" of religious commitment and the existing internal systems through which individuals understand their personal commitment. Some continue to practice the religion of conformity while others resist that tendency to attempt their own definition of religious commitment. This is similar to the continuing shift in understanding religious practice and

¹Robert A. Raines, *Reshaping the Christian Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 132f.

ritual which has occurred in the evolution from the primitive mind through the transitional axial age into the modern era.

This change and the resulting gap is clarified by Jung's interpretation of mythology and primitive religious practice as psychic projections. The decline of superstition and dependence upon rituals as efficacious means does not mean the disappearance of the psychic realities they represented, but a change in the way they are expressed.

Decreasing dependence upon ritual or form, and assigning greater value to an experienced sense of well being, of affiliation, is just one aspect of the secularization of religion. As people become more secular in their consciousness, other therapeutic activities and situations take on meaning and significance and develop religious associations, replacing the form of ritual and cultic observances of the organized church.

THE FOCUS OF THIS WRITING

It is hoped that this paper will, through a look at transitional forms of religious commitment, accent the meaning "commitment" expresses. Presently there is entirely too much emphasis upon the activity that the term implies. The experience of many members has come to be similar to that of this layman:

Joining the First church became a milestone in my spiritual development: the beginning, it might be said, of the institutional Christianity phase of my life. As I became acquainted with the members of the fellowship, various organizational activities came my way . . . work on publicity, on the Every-Member-Canvass, ushering, the planning of special programs and all the busy busy work which must be done in a . . . church.

There were real satisfactions in all this activity, not the least of which was a pharisaical feeling of smugness at being so strenuously engaged in the work of the church. . . . I had an intellectual acceptance of the Christian ethic, but no deep concern--no sense of personal involvement or commitment.²

It is errant that activity becomes such a large part of commitment within the church. This paper seeks to examine the evolution of forms of commitment expressed within the Judeo-Christian tradition and the way they were understood by the people of their time. This paper will explore how the meaning of Christian commitment today is experienced and expressed through involvement in small groups rather than the inadequate rituals of baptism and membership, how small groups within the church are a vehicle through which a sense of community emerges and through which the fullest expression of Christianity's ideals of commitment to God and humanity is experienced, and how small groups bear greater meaning than traditional forms (rites and practices) of expressing religious commitment and must be used to carry the meaning of the limping, traditional forms. It

²Ibid., pp. 25f.

is likely that the small group is a key to resurrecting the dead or dying symbols of church life.

DEFINITIONS

It is essential to establish limits for certain terms which will be recurring in this paper. Key words from the title provide a point of departure for the development of this subject.

In this paper a rather narrow definition of the term "religious" has been adopted. It is not intended to include philosophical underpinnings present when the word is used by a theologian, but rather to express an attitude present in more popular discussion as the word is commonly and loosely used. In this writing the term "religious" is taken to mean the human activity which is a regular part of life within the organized church, attempting to express the feelings, convictions and experiences of those people there who identify themselves as members of the Community of Faith.

Defining "commitment" is a larger task because in a sense that is largely the purpose of this writing. To speak of commitment is not a new undertaking for the church. It is a term long used and frequently. However, its usual connotation has differed from its usage here in two ways. First, commitment has been discussed in terms of

an obligation or duty one has to fulfill. The church has meant that humanity owes a debt which must be repaid in terms of a commitment. The action of God has imposed a burden on humanity to respond in the form of returning everything to the one who has given all. While acknowledging human freedom it has imposed an obligation. This was H. R. Niebuhr's "man the citizen" living under law. Niebuhr's new category, "man the answerer" better speaks for the position taken here.³

Here commitment arises out of the freedom one has. Here it is realized that the church must not play the role of judge demanding retribution and must not engage in manipulative behavior by playing on dependency needs if it is to engender commitment to its message. Activity arising out of a need to justify oneself by works comes from the guilty feeling of a dependent person. The church must encourage growth toward actualizing self-determining modes of behavior, because commitment really comes only when an actualizing person, in freedom, perceives something worthy of devotion and loyalty. This is not to say the object of devotion necessarily has intrinsic value, but that the person perceives it to have value.

This is the "inner-requiredness," as Maslow called

³H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 56.

it, which arises from the depths of a person and is felt as a kind of self-indulgence rather than a duty. Maslow wrote, "it is different from and separable from 'external requiredness' which is rather felt as a response to what the environment, the situation, the problem, the external world calls for or requires of the person, as a fire 'calls for' putting out."⁴ This is a more positive approach to commitment than has been expressed traditionally in the priestly sense as "calling" or "vocation."

The traditional understanding of total commitment is usually interpreted to mean exactly the opposite of self-affirmation.⁵ It has been synonymous with self-forgetting, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving, self-effacing. Throughout their history Christians have symbolized this kind of commitment by denying both body and mind. This basic motif, a type of masochism, has traditionally expressed human obligation. Humanity must surrender itself to God.

Responsibility, not obligation, carries the meaning of this concept of commitment. Niebuhr developed the idea further:

⁴Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Meta-Motivation," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, VII; 2(1967), 95.

⁵Harry DeWire, *Communication as Commitment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 46.

'The great God has treated us as responsible beings' (is an idea that) seems to have become common only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a relatively late-born child therefore, in the family of words in which duty, law, virtue, goodness and morality are its much older siblings. This history may mean nothing more, of course, than that men have found a new sign for a well known phenomenon and an old idea But it is also possible that the word gives us a new symbol with which to grasp and understand . . . hidden references, allusions and similes which are in the depths of our mind as we grope for understanding of ourselves and toward definition of ourselves in action.⁶

A second aspect to be noted is that commitment here refers to a process of choosing rather than an act of transaction, of repayment. It seems that commitment has usually been understood in terms of an act involving particular aspects of a person's being, one's money, one's time, or one's life. Rather than focusing upon the effect of the process, of concern here is the expression of choice in the act of committing, the process that is involved in its expression.

A meaningful expression of commitment occurs when one values something in one's sphere of existence enough to act upon it. This implies an awareness of alternatives and a process of choosing. This is a significant development in a person's life. In the preface to her book, *Culture and Commitment*, Margaret Mead succinctly put a helpful perspective on this development:

⁶Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 47f.

The idea of choice in commitment entered human history when competing styles of life were endowed with new kinds of sanction of religious or political ideology. No longer a matter of minor comparisons between tribes, as civilization developed commitment became a matter of choice between entire systems of thought. In the phrasings of a Middle Eastern religion, one system became right and all others wrong; in the gentler words of Asian religions, other systems 'provided a different way.' It was then that the question: To which do I commit my life? was raised for the thoughtful in a form which only temporarily reunites in isolated and barricaded forms in closed religious sects like the Hutterites--or behind iron curtains into which no alien note is permitted to enter.

In this century with rising insistence and anguish, there is now a new note: Can I commit my life to anything? Is there anything in human cultures as they exist today worth saving, worth committing myself to? We find the suicide of the fortunate and the gifted, the individual who feels no abiding and unquestioning tie with any social form. Just as man is newly faced with the responsibility for not destroying the human race and all living things and for using his accumulated knowledge to build a safe world, so at this moment the individual is freed to stand aside and question not only his belief in God, his belief in science, or his belief in socialism, but his belief in anything at all.⁷

This freedom of choice in commitment has left many with the prior question of value unanswered, as Mead clearly noted. The act of valuing presupposes that one alternative way of believing is better than others. When, upon examining various ways of thinking and acting around the world, it becomes clear that there is not one clearly superior to all others, the process of valuing comes slowly and sometimes never. Commitment waits upon valuing.

⁷Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p. x.

The difficulty in valuing and choosing draws considerable comment. May, in discussing the "roots of our malady" lists several losses which create the difficulty:

1. The loss of the center of values in our society.
2. The loss of the sense of self or the sense of self worth.
3. The loss of language for personal communication of deeply personal meanings to each other.
4. The loss of the power to value; to affirm and believe in any value.⁸

These losses, moving in concert with the development of pluralistic, relativistic, modern life, frame the problem of commitment.

Noting that the current milieu does not ease the process of choice in commitment, two other conditions of the situation need mention. First is the matter of the possibility of making more than a provisional commitment. A basic commitment consists of more than choosing, for there is the matter of being chosen or grasped. In a basic commitment man participates in a process which calls him out of himself and his response becomes ultimate. The extent of man's role in this process has been debated since before Augustine and Pelagius classically framed the polarity.

A second issue is raised by Tillich. He disliked the use of the word "commitment," because it has been so

⁸Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself* (New York: Norton, 1953), cpt. 2.

abused and because one cannot commit oneself to anything absolutely. In the moment of making an absolute commitment he felt the finite became infinite because "that moment gains absolute superiority over all other moments in our life."⁹ Commitment is not a term he chose to use often.

Despite these two objections which might be raised, there is a process involved here which is of crucial importance. The present situation of commitment demands attention be given to its role in the human life.

A summary of this complex term of commitment is found in the dictionary. Commitment, it says, is a "decisive moral choice that involves a person in a definite course of action."¹⁰ The root form of commitment derives from the Latin *committere* which means to connect or entrust. This seems to bring together all the above comments on valuing, choosing and acting.

A final term to define is "modern." It is clear that the concerns of this writing will not embrace all people, but only those struggling with the meaning and expression of Christian commitment. For some this issue seems settled. These will not be typical Christians, for reasons very similar to those which distinguish patients

⁹D. Mackenzie Brown (comp.) *Ultimate Concern* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 195.

¹⁰Webster's *Third International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass., Merriam, 1968), p. 457.

of a psychoanalyst from other members of society:

To be sure, the persons who get to the consulting rooms of the psychoanalysts and psychotherapists are not a cross section of the population. By and large they are the ones for whom the conventional pretenses and defenses of the society no longer work. Very often they are the more sensitive and gifted members of the society; they need to get help broadly speaking, because they are less successful at rationalizing than the well-adjusted 'citizen' who is able for the time being to cover up his underlying conflicts.¹¹

Defining "modern" also concerned Jung.¹² He distinguished between modern man and pseudo-modern man.

Several characteristics identify modern man. He is not the average man because he has an unusually high amount of awareness or consciousness. Relatively few have this superlative consciousness. Merely living in the present does not make one modern, because as Jung said, "He alone is modern who is fully conscious of the present."¹³ He added that psychologically the lowest stratum of society today live almost as unconsciously as did the primitive tribes. Modern man is estranged from tradition and therefore from many of his fellowmen because he no longer is

¹¹May, op. cit., p. 17. Other distinguishing features of these patients such as middle class values, education and money are omitted by May, but should be noted.

¹²Carl G. Jung, *Modern Man In Search of A Soul* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 226-237. Admittedly this is a unique definition of the term, but it seems necessary to distinguish this group from the general body of contemporary people.

¹³Ibid., p. 226.

concerned with past values and strivings except from a historical standpoint. In fact, according to Jung, man is only totally modern when he realizes that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow. This man is free whose awareness frees him from unconscious acceptance of those things which are himself or part of him. Modern man is questionable and suspect because he renounces the halo which history gives those who follow its lead. Modern man, like a minority group, must excell if he is to be tolerated, because he is not accepted by the mass as it accepts itself.

For modern man the various religions present a problem because they no longer express his innermost being, his own psychic life. He may, Jung said, try on various established religious expressions and convictions as if they were "Sunday attire" but he lays them aside like "worn out clothes."

Jung's pseudo-modern man offers a contrast. He is the "pop" revolutionary who presents himself at the same void as the modern man, through with the past and ready for new creations. His problem is that he has leaped over several stages of development and the tasks they represent. He has not grown to awareness, but aspires to it. He can parrot the language of the modern man and share in the criticism of the contemporary, though he reasons not why. Moreover, it is that his own undiscovered self, escaping

its boredom is attracted by the criticism of what is, simply because it does not satisfy him, not because he realizes its inadequacies. "They appear suddenly beside modern man as uprooted human beings, bloodsucking ghosts, whose emptiness is taken for the unenviable loneliness of modern man and casts discredit upon him."¹⁴

Finally, in using the term "religious" a distinction has already been made between it and "Christian." Noting this distinction, a "Christian" is defined as one who has moved through the process of commitment in a personal decision made in response to the living Christ who continues to make himself known in the world of human experience today. The focus of this writing is at that point where a Christian making a personal commitment may choose to express it in religious acts as part of an organized group of believers. Participation in the life and ritual of the community of faith becomes, according to this definition, the religious expression of personal commitment.

In speaking about the possibility of religious commitment for a modern Christian, it is possible at most to state a likelihood, a potentially feasible expression for him. This initiates that effort.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 237.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF COMMITMENT IN THE PSYCHE

Traditionally most Christian churches in America have delayed conferring membership upon a person until that person is able to realize the significance of the act. No specific age has been adopted, but the age most often involved is found at the beginning of the teen years. This age is also often described as the "age of accountability" or the "age of reasoning." The age of thirteen, associated with the onset of puberty, assumes universal meaning as the gateway to adulthood in many cultures. At puberty the child becomes ready to assume responsibilities and privileges of adulthood and the "rites of passage" introduce his new role in society.

In recent years in the United States, increased emphasis has been given to another criterion for church membership. The sixth grade has become significant as a point at which one becomes eligible for Confirmation Class, ready for church membership, ready to assume religious responsibilities. At this point a child is understood to have reached the "age of accountability" and is then eligible to become a member of the denomination which in that case represents the Christian church.

The vagueness associated with readiness for church

membership results perhaps from the realization in modern society that a "magic" age or point is difficult or impossible to assign. However vague a statement regarding "timing" might be, a clearer statement is made by the implicit assumption that a process of development must carry the child to a place in life where one becomes able to make decisions based upon a developing system of values.

No empirically verifiable set of criteria has brought this "stage of life" about, rather it has been arbitrarily adopted as an age at which a child becomes aware of one's duty to God and becomes able to declare Him as Lord and to assume the role of servant. Christianity has historically emphasized that everyone is a debtor owing all things to God. And so, the object of life became to repay that debt, to live to glorify God and to be a faithful steward of all that had been entrusted to one's care and keeping. Of course, the Church as the body of Christ and the earthly representative of the reign of God was the appropriate and necessary arena for the life purpose to be acted out. Participation and membership were taken as an indication that one had realized the purpose of life and had responded to God's command.

Many have moved from that position of total dependency today to where they deny any claim upon life other than what they choose to place there. The oath of fealty is no longer obligatory to large segments of the popu-

lation. Buber noted the "eclipse of God," Bonhoeffer wrote about "man come of age" and countless others, responsible churchmen too, see humanity in a new relationship to God.

Studies in the psychology of religion, personality theory and human development have enabled those living in the twentieth century to understand some of the dynamics involved in growth and development. Humanity has developed a greater self-consciousness. Humanity is able more than before was possible to view itself under a microscope, to examine the various parts which make it human. Greater self-consciousness has arisen out of a fuller understanding of what it means to be a human being.

Sometimes this self-consciousness becomes preoccupation with self. Humanity sometimes becomes the only object under the looking glass. At those times efforts to create God in the human image, to develop an anthropomorphic Being, to make the cosmos anthropocentric proliferate as a result of the increased ability to plumb the depths of one's own being. Scientism becomes the tool for the self-understanding some seek. Rational and critical analysis become the dictum for developing an empirical base for self understanding and people are often viewed as mechanical, predictable, reactors. This type of thinking has motivated two approaches to human psychology in this century, the classical Freudian School and the Learning Theory or Behavior Modification School.

This same rationale has stimulated Christian thought. It has traditionally seen human beings as mechanical beings characterized by dependency needs, exhibited primarily in a continuing need for a father figure. Christianity has seen the individual as a free moral agent, who was at the same time a debtor, owing an oath of allegiance to God, free, but required. Calvinism further reduced the element of freedom with the notions of election and predestination which determine one's ability to respond. There are some distinct parallels between Christian thought and the Freudian view of humanity. This unseemly alliance may have made the competition between them over the past century keener than otherwise would have been.

Another course however, is being charted which moves away from this traditional view which psychology and Christianity have jointly expressed. A new force poses an alternate view of humanity. This view moves away from the ideas usually suggested which characterize a person as a mechanically determined being ever in need of a father figure or as one who can be evaluated by empirical assessment and controlled by predetermined behavior patterns. This third approach to human psychology is the basis of the next section of this chapter which discusses commitment as a basic ingredient of human nature. Considering the role of commitment in the psyche requires that attention be given to its place in the life of the species and, on a

more personal level, its meaning for the individual. The next section of this chapter will look at the former. The latter will be examined in the second section.

The second section of this chapter is to aid in understanding the role of commitment in the development of personal identity. For this purpose there is a discussion of its role in the psychosocial developmental stages suggested by Erikson.

The final section of this chapter will examine the value of religious commitment as a frame of reference for the individual in making the decision to commit oneself to something. In this section the personal gain of an act of faith, of valuing something of uncertain worth, of expressing ultimate commitment religiously becomes a final vantage point for viewing the role of commitment in the psyche.

COMMITMENT AS A BASIC ELEMENT OF HUMAN NATURE

This discussion is initiated with an awareness that any proposition about human nature, as it is analyzed, becomes involved in debate. Niebuhr, introducing *The Nature and Destiny of Man* admitted this position: "Every affirmation which he (man) may make about his stature, virtue or place in the cosmos becomes involved in contradictions when fully analyzed."¹ The analysis tends to

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, 1.

reveal questions or aspects which call the original assertion into question. Yet the discussion is meaningful and serves to advance the cause of the inquiry, so it is undertaken.

The Place of Values

Discussions about what distinguishes humanity from other parts of the created order have listed various items. These have noted the prehensile thumb (physiological differences), rational power (intellectual differences), the capacity to love (emotional differences) and the ability to make examination from a vantage point removed from the self (transcendence). Yet, another dimension is present which Frankl calls the "Will to Meaning."² In his system of logotherapy this specifically human dimension of man is known as the "spiritual." This dimension does not have a primarily religious connotation, but focuses upon values, ideals and meanings which, when absent, give rise to existential frustration.

In stating the concepts of logotherapy, Frankl appears defensive in his assertions that meanings and values are not secondary rationalizations of instinctive drives. No doubt this was brought about by his cultural

²Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p. 154.

immersion in classical psychoanalysis. To the original psychoanalytic school such things are defense mechanisms, reaction formations and sublimations. Freud himself said, "the moment one inquires about the sense or value of life, one is sick."³

It is coincidence that Frankl's logotherapy became known to some as "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" for as he wrote, an American, Abraham Maslow, was building an edifice to challenge the two leading theories of human behavior (Freudianism and Behaviorism), an edifice which he identified as Third Force Psychology. Maslow, aware of Frankl's efforts, developed and expanded a theory of human motivation to the point that now there is no need for defensiveness or uncertainty from those who subscribe to it.

Basic to Third Force Psychology is the assumption that there are values or moral principles common to the entire human species which can be scientifically confirmed.⁴ Maslow calls these "Being-Values." They must be included in any complete definition of "human being" or of "a person." These values are what more traditional Western

³Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1957), III, 465. Freud was a complex man. This characterizes his thought, but does not represent his total view of the meaning of life.

⁴Frank Goble, *The Third Force* (New York: Pocket Books, 1971), p. 91.

philosophy has termed "goods." Maslow lists them in the upper level of his hierarchy of needs. They include: meaningfulness, self-sufficiency, effortlessness, playfulness, richness, simplicity, order, justice, completion, necessity, perfection, individuality, aliveness, beauty, goodness and truth.⁵

The B-Values appear as a group near the top of Maslow's scale of needs and are not arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency. They are nearly equal in strength. They vary in order, however, from individual to individual because of the uniqueness present in each person. These values must be assessed to locate

the deepest, most authentic, most constitutionally based aspects of the real self, of the identity, or of the authentic person. We find that in order to be comprehensive we must include not only the person's constitution and temperament, not only anatomy, physiology, neurology, and endocrinology, not only his capacities, his biological style, not only his basic instinctoid needs, but also, the B-values, which are also his B-values.⁶

The B-values are the basis of his theory of metamotivation which too, is species wide and is therefore supracultural, common-human, not created arbitrarily by culture. Metaneeds are satisfied like the lower, more basic needs of food and water. They are in fact located on

⁵Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962), p. 78.

⁶Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Metamotivation," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, VII:2 (1967), 105.

the same continuum and rise to ascendance as the lower needs are met. The basic needs are prepotent and occupy attention until they are met, but as the lower needs are met, the higher needs then may be satisfied. Maslow says, "the so called spiritual (or transcendent or axiological) life is clearly rooted in the biological nature of the species."⁷ It is a kind of "higher" animality whose precondition is a healthy "lower" animality. They are hierarchically integrated rather than mutually exclusive. Notice that this approach removes the dichotomy between lower and higher natures, between flesh and spirit, and again integrates man into a whole, returning to a Hebraic understanding of human nature.

Due to the unity of the human being, failure to satisfy the metaneeds with B-values causes complications in the whole organism. "The B-values," Maslow says, "seem to me to be also biological necessities in order (a) negatively to avoid illness and (b) positively to achieve full-humanness."⁸ The consequences of a deprivation of B-values are known as metopathologies. They have traditionally been discussed by religionists, historians and philosophers rather than physicians, scientists or psychologists. For this reason they have been known as spiritual or religious shortcomings rather than psychiatric

⁷Ibid., p. 115.

⁸Ibid., p. 106.

or biological illnesses. They are not to be monopolized by any, but considered and discussed by all. Some of the metopathologies Maslow lists are alienation, meaninglessness, valuelessness, desacralization of life, despair, joylessness, death wishes and apathy.

The extent to which these metopathologies are present in society confronts one with a problematic situation. Maslow recognizes that the metaneeds are not fully evident or actualized (fully functioning) in most people. For this reason he acknowledges that most often these exist as potentialities not actualities. While the metaneeds are basic to human beings, their development depends upon the support they receive. That support can be denied and often is. In fact, cultures have tended to restrain development of the metaneeds. Culture and biology are not in principle opposed, but neither are they necessarily supportive. Culture is actually supportive to the degree that it satisfies lower needs of the hierarchy. Society has seldom satisfied the individual needs of its members but prohibits the development of self-actualizing individuals because of poverty, exploitation, prejudice, and so on. Prognosis depends on how and where one lives and what one's social-economic-political circumstances are. "This higher spiritual, 'animality' is so timid and weak and so easily lost; is so easily crushed by stronger cultural forces, that it can become widely actualized only

in a culture which approves of human nature and therefore actively fosters its fullest growth."⁹

The result of this counterforce is a tendency to fear growth and to regress. A tendency toward inertia tends to counter the drive toward growth and development. This fully characterizes the human situation. Whether it is a nature inherited or acquired becomes debatable, but the obvious presence of these two counterforces in life speaks to the paradoxical character of human nature. Because humanity exists, unsatisfied, in a cosmic situation that profoundly threatens existence, people experience these counterforces at the heart of their being. These forces call to higher ideals and move toward a debased, inhuman existence both at once. This reveals the two aspects of human nature which the Bible describes.

The Christian Scripture focuses on two ideas when it speaks of humanity. It says that humanity is unworthy and sinful and yet is of infinite worth and possesses great dignity. These two ideas may be expressed in terms of the tendency toward growth and life and the tendency to fear growth and to regress. A conflict situation is present, as there has always been when two opposing tendencies exist side by side. The situation is in flux, is unresolved, until the person makes a choice. Actually, no value exists

⁹Ibid., p. 115.

for the person until he becomes involved in the give and take between these opposing tendencies. Values deal not with feeling or emotion, but with will or volition.¹⁰

The Necessity of Choice

It is will or volition which causes value to come into being for the individual. Consciousness and purposiveness must be viewed as elements of a condition which begins with the infant's first awareness of his/her own body. It is only in the process of self-discovery and discovery of others that consciousness emerges. Freedom is then gained to the extent that the person arranges the givens which are part of existence. Being human requires conscious choice, purposeful, deliberate action. Kierkegaard rephrased Socrates' "Know thyself" to "Choose oneself" and declared the latter the more important task.¹¹

Thomas Aquinas made a similar statement about humanity regarding conscious choice:

Of the actions done by man, those alone are called properly human which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from the irrational creatures in this, that he is master of his own acts. . . . But man is master of his own acts by reason and will: hence free-will is said to be a function of will and reason. Those

¹⁰John A. Hutchison, *Language and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 117.

¹¹Søren Kierkegaard, *Either Or* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), II, 216.

actions, therefore, are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.¹²

The ability to make discriminating choices comes from an understanding of what one wants. The capacity for self-direction rises as one realizes what one wants. May stated:

Knowing what one wants is simply the elemental form of what in the maturing person is the ability to choose one's own values. The mark of the mature man is that his living is integrated around self-chosen goals.¹³

This brief discussion on volition or will and choice has been created by the paradoxical relationship between the instinctive values Maslow understands to be inherent in humanity and their absence from the flow of life for many people. To move toward the realization of those needs, one must first identify them and then locate sources of satisfaction. Conscious movement is necessary to own the values which satisfy the need, just as water must be secured to satisfy the thirst. The B-values must be incorporated into one's style-of-life so that one's potential is realized to its greatest extent.

¹²Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, Prima Secundae. Q I. Resp. Tr. by J. Rickaby (London: Burns and Oates, 1896) in H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (1st ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 49.

¹³Rollo May, *Man's Search For Himself* (New York: Norton, 1953), p. 176.

Choosing and Integration

The goal adopted or claimed as one's own becomes value in human life. It becomes an integrating force moving the person along his/her life line. Macquarrie wrote:

The absence of such a commitment results in an existence that jumps from one immediate possibility to the next, an existence that may be very much at the mercy of chance circumstances or changing desires and that has only the lowest degree of selfhood and unity.¹⁴

Values integrate the person, acting as a psychological center, a kind of core of integration around which to organize and develop the "person one truly is."

Choosing, valuing, acting, and committing are inseparable. It is when the whole self is involved that the whole self can be expressed. Partial participation means partial expression--fragmented living without a unified existence. "The integration of personality, the completeness of a loyalty and the durability of a loyalty are the main criteria for measuring the mature integration of a person."¹⁵

It is impossible to have a healthy existence without the presence of chosen values. Valuelessness according

¹⁴John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 68.

¹⁵Wayne Oates, *The Religious Dimensions of Personality* (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 271.

to Maslow is the ultimate disease of our time. He wrote:

The state of being without a system of values is psychopathogenic. Human beings need a philosophy of life, religion or a value system just as they need sunlight, calcium and love. The person who lacks a value system may be impulsive, nihilistic, totally skeptic, in other words, his life is meaningless.¹⁶

The Being-values, which as Maslow said, represent the metaneeds of the human being, must be incorporated into the life of the individual. Failure to satisfy these metaneeds as with the basic needs, results in a frustrated or "sick" individual. Without food to satisfy hunger a person wastes away. Without the satisfaction of the metaneeds, again a person wastes away, is not fully what he/she should or could be and is in a sense defined as sick or thwarted.¹⁷ Without the satisfaction of the metaneeds, one is not able to actualize inherent potential, to be what one fully is. The achievement of the desire for self-fulfillment is what Maslow means by "self-actualization." The self-actualizing person is among other things motivated by some value toward which movement is directed and to which loyalty is given.¹⁸

The responses which achieve this satisfaction, this self-actualization arise from one's inner self and are

¹⁶Goble, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁷Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, L (July 1943), 381.

¹⁸Goble, op. cit., p. 63.

heard and seen as one's words and gestures, which are symbolic of this inner self.¹⁹ Unification of the self, the establishment of a psychological core around which to move, results from the satisfaction attained from having successfully reached toward that which meets the metaneeds.

The pursuit of this end is a commitment of faith, because of the vagaries involved in meeting these higher needs. Hunger is satisfied by food just as the other physiological needs have their source of satisfaction. What is it though that brings fulfillment, this ultimate concern of humanity? What is it which makes a person whole, what he/she can be at most?

The master possibility seen by man can come into being only as humanity moves toward it in purposeful activity. Charting that course unifies a person and deals with the inner conflicts which obstruct and dissipate one's energies. A person consistently pursues this master possibility, other possibilities are subordinated and movement toward unified selfhood progresses.

Failure to satisfy the metaneeds results in an incomplete person, a partial being. Pursuit of the Being-values offers the opportunity to satisfy those needs, but the tension between the tendency to growth and the tendency

¹⁹ Harry Dewire, *Communication As Commitment* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1972), p. 28.

to regress restrains and inhibits their existence. Only by choice, by commitment to a consistent, continuous pattern of behavior leading toward an ultimate concern takes one there. "Commitment . . . serves as the field of force that organizes the fractionated experience of being into meaningful wholes, concepts, *gastalten*."²⁰

COMMITMENT AS AN ELEMENT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The role of commitment in the human species as Maslow described it becomes more personal, more individualized in Erikson's discussion concerning commitment as an element of personal identity. Both men, approaching human development differently share much common ground in their belief that development necessitates that one make progression choices instead of regression choices in the process of life. Erikson's contribution to the discussion of commitment follows.

Commitment In the Psychosocial Stages

Erikson's idea of developmental stages is based on an epigenetic principle which is derived from observation of the growth of organisms *in utero*. The principle statement coming from that observation is that a ground plan

²⁰ Sidney Jourard, "Growing Awareness and Awareness of Growth," in Herbert Otto and John Mann (eds.) *Ways of Growth* (New York: Grossman, 1968), p. 13.

guides the growth of any organism and that parts arise according to the schedule of the ground plan. Each part gains ascendancy over the whole as it begins to emerge then accedes to another part as it becomes ascendant in its turn. When all parts have developed, they together form a functioning whole.

The stages to which Erikson refers relate specifically to personality development and are called psychosocial stages. The psychosocial stages of development are an attempt to examine an aspect of life which is vitally interrelated to other segments of human development. Others approach the examination of human development differently. One method is found in psychoanalytic literature which identifies psychosexual development, another deals with the steps of cognitive maturation as it is discussed most completely by Piaget.²¹ One other possible approach is the physiological which discusses stages identified by the science of biology.

Erikson's understanding of human development divides the life cycle into eight stages, each stage having a developmental task. The stages begin in infancy and continue through a final stage which includes the last years of life. According to the epigenetic principle

²¹Jean Piaget and B. Inhelder, *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: Basic Books, 1958), 356ff.

discussed above, the tasks of each stage assume dominance until those tasks have been achieved. Achievement is only partial and temporary, however because crises encountered in life cause one to regress periodically to rework some of his earlier developments. Commitment appears with the tasks of adolescence.

Commitment As Fidelity

Commitment for Erikson, appears as "Fidelity." It becomes a crucial element for the individual during the adolescent years. Its nature is such that it could not develop earlier in life and is so vital to the future of the person that it must attain its period of ascendancy if the development of the individual is to continue. After its period of ascendancy, it continues functioning as a part of the healthy person throughout his life. Fidelity is one of several qualities possessed by the individual which become developed or weakened as the person moves through the life stages.

Fidelity and the other qualities are called virtues. A specific one accompanies each life stage. For instance, Hope is the most basic of the virtues. It is the earliest and most indispensable virtue inherent in being alive. This corresponds chronologically with the first psychosocial attitude which is trust. Hope must be encouraged as the infant's needs for contact and intake are

satisfied by its parents. Hope is the most basic strength required for life. The remaining seven virtues are: (in childhood) Will, Purpose, Competence; (in adolescence) Fidelity; (in adulthood) Love, Care and Wisdom. These are all interrelated. Later ones depend on the earlier ones for existence. Note that in adolescence, the virtue to be developed is Fidelity alone.

Virtue for Erikson is another way of speaking of inherent strength.²² He cites the old English meaning of the word which was "inherent strength" or "active quality." It was used especially in reference to well preserved medicines and liquors. The meaning he gives to virtue is similar to "spirit." The presence of "spirit" in a man indicates strength or virtue. The absence or dwarfing of any of the eight virtues indicates a deficient organism which must function below its potential level. A virtue is developed from stage to stage in Erikson's system and passed from generation to generation.

Virtues, then, are core strengths which are built into the schedule of individual development. "Such a strength, to me, is not a moral trait to be acquired by individual effort. Rather I believe it to be part of the human equipment evolved with socio-genetic evolution" wrote

²²Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 113.

Erikson.²³ They are strengths which are part of all aspects of human development, for they all together create the whole person. Each component occupies a vital place in the being of that individual. Due to the nature of the individual's growth, Erikson has acknowledged the role of society in the successful development of virtues. While the virtues belong to an evolutionary heritage, they can arise to fullness only as the life stage of the individual responds to individuals and social forces around it. Just as Maslow's person is deflected from the Being-values by the environment, so are the virtues of the individual perverted and corrupted by the maladies in which they are born and grow, according to Erikson.

Fidelity, the essential virtue of adolescence, is manifested in the erratic and often frantic search of adolescence to find a worthy object of devotion. Erikson has noted that:

In all youths seeming shiftiness and seeking after some durability in change can be detected, whether in the accuracy of scientific and technical method or in the sincerity of conviction, in the veracity of historical and fictional accounts or the fairness of the rules of the game, in the authenticity or artistic production or in the genuineness of personalities and the reliability of commitments.²⁴

²³Erik Erikson, "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," in his *Youth* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 1.

²⁴Erik Erikson, *Identity* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 235.

The radical degree of temporariness of loyalties in youth has shown the strength of this uncertain virtue as it looks for an end in which to invest itself. Fidelity could not occur earlier than the adolescent years because of the prerequisite tasks necessary for its emergence. Just as important, however, is that fidelity should emerge at that time, because the later tasks and virtues depend upon it as a basis for their growth. If the virtue of fidelity is disabled or retarded, the person is unable to continue normally in the course of development. On the other hand, its presence normally yields strength enough to support and maintain the values the person has chosen to uphold.

Fidelity becomes solidified when the individual has sorted through the images of reality which have been communicated through his/her culture. The inconsistencies are then smoothed and the interim loyalty becomes transformed into allegiance to permanent values and principles. When it has fully matured, it is the strength of disciplined devotion. "Fidelity," Erikson has written, "is the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems. It is the cornerstone of identity and receives inspiration from confirming companions."²⁵ In his system, Fidelity should

²⁵ Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, p. 125.

appear with the task of establishing identity. The two appear together in life as in his constructed system.

Commitment and Self-Understanding

Using the power to commit oneself to something affects the basic understanding a person has of him/herself. As noted above, it is the cornerstone of identity. Erikson has cited Shakespeare's Hamlet as a character in his twenties experiencing difficulty in making commitments. Hamlet, a youth no longer a youth, could not take the step into responsibility. His estrangement, which showed itself as a half feigned, half real "insanity," was a result of identity diffusion. Not until near the end of the play did Hamlet use the virtue he had to commit himself to a role as a member of the family. Not until late did he achieve Fidelity and only then did he achieve identity.²⁶

If the virtue of Fidelity to some chosen ideology, religion, or system of values has not been actualized during the adolescent years, the identity of the person has been halted in its formation, has become diffused and further work on developmental tasks cannot seriously be accomplished.

For the individual to continue the developmental process into the final life stage, he/she must have

²⁶Erikson, *Youth*, pp. 4f.

successfully dealt with the intermediate life tasks. The virtue of each stage is rudimentary in this process. The individual at some point must be able to choose loyalties, must be capable of Fidelity or else the successive tasks, stages and virtues will be handicapped in their development. One's commitment creates the system of meaning which shapes a perceived world and moves one ahead in personal growth.

Commitment is a basic element of personal identity. Identity, the task of adolescence, develops to the extent that the virtue of Fidelity is a creating, shaping force in the life of the person.

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE

In the first two sections of this chapter material from two students of the family of man has provided insight into the human need to make commitments. Maslow has shown the inner motivation which causes one to become committed to something outside oneself in order to attain full stature as a human being. Erikson has illustrated the vital role of the virtue of Fidelity in identity formation during the adolescent years. Both the species and the individual have been examined and commitment is seen to be a fundamental element in achieving fullness and meaning in life.

Neither Maslow nor Erikson has used traditional

"God-talk" in dealing with commitment, preferring to use the language of their discipline for their study. It is a conscious effort they make because they and others in their group acknowledge the vertical dimension of life and discuss a force beyond humanity which is identified as a "pressure toward fuller and fuller Being."²⁷ Maslow has said that

in recent years more and more psychologists have found themselves compelled to postulate some tendency to growth or self-perfection to supplement the concepts of equilibrium, homeostasis, tension-reduction, defense and other conserving motivations.²⁸

It seems no longer possible to say that all behavior is motivated to produce satisfaction of needs and drives.

Viewing the writing of these men from a religious orientation, one may think they are deficient because they do not deal with the vertical dimension of life in traditional language. However, it is incorrect to conclude that their discussion of values and meanings does not include the spiritual reality which has usually been called "God."²⁹ An examination of the role of commitment in the

²⁷ Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 151.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁹ At this point a brief excursus will establish an understanding between the reader and the writer. In doing the philosophical analysis necessary for this section of the paper, there is a reluctance to use the word "God" to describe the entity involved in the interaction between man and his transcendent nature. In an effort to discuss the nature of the action in its cosmic context, it is necessary

psyche must include this religious dimension. The following comments will attempt to bridge this apparent gap between Maslow, Erikson and Christian theologians.

From the moment of birth the basic needs of a person become complex very quickly. For example, the needs for food and sleep initially appear quite automatic and pressing. Yet with the passing of time these basic needs take on a different character as they are refined and converted to higher and higher scales of complexity and meaning. They lose their automatic character and come under the regulation of the person who satisfies them in terms of a complex system of values. Satisfaction may be immediate or deferred.

This type of transition occurs generally throughout a person's experience of life so that basic needs, values or meanings change as the organism grows, becomes more complex and goes beyond immediate, specific situations to generalized, universal matters based upon choice.

to avoid such powerful word symbols as "God" for the agency which is involved. In succeeding pages the word will be employed. It is a word which as John Cobb wrote, ". . . has connotations of personality, will, purpose and love, which this language about a unitary and actual agent does not. Christians know that the richness of this language about God grows out of a history of human experience with God and cannot be captured by philosophical analysis or reflection on our present experience in separation from the tradition." ((John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 58)) It is for this very reason that it is avoided at this point.

Paul Tillich's discussion of this process of growth in humanity has called this the development of "Ultimate Concern." The term means to take something with ultimate seriousness. It is not a thing or object, but rather ". . . primarily a quality or dimension of human concern or valuation."³⁰ It is an active process dominating the life of the person. This is the religious experience. "Religious experience," Tillich has written, "is an experience of ultimate concern."³¹ It deals with ultimate values or ultimate valuation.

Tillich's use of the phrase "ultimate concern" covers his dissatisfaction with the term "commitment." In a dialogue he explained his position:

. . . In order to be a Christian or to be a fully developed personality--this can be expressed humanistically or religiously--you have to be involved substantially in something. We can call it commitment, but the word has to me a very bad sound. I do not like it. It has been so much abused and there is also the problem of the possibility of making a vow. I would say that vows are impossible; we cannot commit ourselves to anything absolutely. A vow for life in any respect is impossible, because it gives to the finite moment in which we are willing to do this an absolute superiority above all other later moments in our life.³²

³⁰Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 32.

³¹Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 105f.

³²D. Mackenzie Brown, (comp.) *Ultimate Concern* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 195.

With his interminable precision Tillich objected to a connotation of the word. Others who see less difficulty with the word insist on its use. Wieman stated that "philosophy is ultimate concern. Religion is ultimate commitment."³³ Wieman implied that commitment is active concern. Tillich's criticism, however, makes the reader aware of the problem involved when speaking of commitment in an ultimate or religious sense. Having taken note of the distinction made by Tillich but still using the original term, the religious dimension of commitment, ultimate commitment, is approached.

Two characteristics make it necessary for humanity to raise ultimate questions. The first is the capacity to transcend the immediate situation in time and space. The second comes from the inability to fathom the depths of the cosmos. It is this "in-betweeness" which prompts the search for ultimates, which causes humanity to be *animal symbolicum*. These two characteristics will now be examined. Later organized religious systems will be considered to learn how they have used a faith commitment as a means of dealing with these two characteristics of humanity.

³³Henry N. Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 5.

The Religious Dimension of Commitment

The human capacity to transcend the immediate situation in time and space is expressed in a tendency to "outgrow" present occupations. Growth in strength and knowledge cause one to see the world ever in new ways. As one discovers new elements of the world, one must learn their affect and how best to relate to them. Also, familiar elements appear to change as the person sees them differently or experiences them in a new way. Jourard has written that:

Growth is the disintegration of one way of experiencing the world, followed by the reorganization of this experience, a reorganization that included the new disclosure of the world. The disorganization or even shattering of one way to experience the world is brought on by new disclosures from the changing being of the world, disclosures that were always being transmitted but were usually ignored.³⁴

The growth cycle is often begun by a failure in goal seeking. As one starts to do something it may be seen that the initial concepts were false. One then must suspend present understandings and develop new ones. Or, sometimes in the process of meeting goals and completing projects they turn stale. The dissonance is then experienced in a number of ways, some of which may be boredom, despair, depression, anxiety or guilt.

³⁴Jourard, op. cit., p. 2.

The human predicament is that dissonance or disillusionment may occur in beliefs, concepts and expectations of the world and the way the world is perceived at any time. Suddenly the Assumptive World out of which one operates can become unreal. New perceptions and feelings no longer bring it confirmation. One then begins to examine the challenged parts of one's phenomenal world. One soon discovers that as a person's system of thought expands, it becomes possible to criticize every goal and every impulse and to find that it does not have enough value to outweigh alternative and contrary goals. A person may eventually realize that all objects for loyalty that can be found can be so affected by personal changes that they will be drained of their value and be left as remnants of what was a way of life.

Possibly one could invest oneself in people and achieve a humanistic orientation through which to view life and its energies. It soon becomes evident to the observer watching this hypothetical person however, that there is a truth here which has been classically stated by Roberts:

Even the best secular ideals do not fully satisfy man's need for relating individual life organically to the life of the race. The kind of solidarity worthy of complete devotion cannot be actualized by a single nation, a single civilization or a single epoch of history. If ultimate loyalty is to be directed toward

an ideal incarnate in a community instead of ideals which remain abstract, that community must be potentially universal.³⁵

The universal community to which Roberts refers has been presented to humanity through the various religious systems. They have offered man a third orientation, an orientation reaching beyond intelligence and culture, offering a universal community through which one is in communion with the source of all being. Religion offers the initiate a total or comprehensive life orientation. This orientation offers life values that provide goals which engage and reach toward fulfillment of the human potential.

As one grows and develops, the human potential also matures so that as the capacity to know and to do increases, so does the ability to understand, to choose and to commit. Only something beyond the limits of present comprehension will be adequate for or worthy of an ultimate commitment as a person further actualizes his/her potential.

The ability to act upon something which is beyond present comprehension is a religious notion. It becomes possible through an act of faith which is also dependent upon a glimpse beyond the immediate situation. It is

³⁵David Roberts, *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 103.

after one becomes aware of the new disclosure of the world that one can begin to reorganize an old understanding of it and experience growth as Jourard indicated in an earlier quote. A vision of the new world must be present before one can begin to achieve it. James Clark has summarized this idea:

Religious development is contingent upon the centering act of faith, the act of developing an unconditional concern with the ultimate. But this cannot occur without a revelation that has allowed us to experience ourselves as engaged with the infinite. It is only then that we will come to value our facing it and moving toward it. . . .³⁶

Religious systems have been a vehicle through which the experience of being engaged with the infinite was fostered. Assisting a person to attain and move beyond human limitations has been one of the functions of religious systems. They have arisen partially in response to the human's capacity to transcend the immediate situation in time and space.

The last several paragraphs discussing one of the human characteristics which lead persons to the religious dimension of commitment has been based upon the type of search humanity conducts to find something worthy of an undivided loyalty, something worthy of being an ultimate

³⁶James Clark, "Toward A Theory And Practice of Religious Experience," in James Bugental (ed.) *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 257.

concern. Experiencing relationship with the infinite and having a vision of universal values brings one to a point where that commitment which goes beyond demonstrable knowledge is possible. Having come to this, certain values are incorporated into life which imply a specific understanding of the limits within which human life must move to hold all the worth and meaning it can. This approach to ultimate commitment comes only out of freedom and strength. Dissatisfaction with the present world is experienced as a stimulus to go beyond immediate comprehension. One can then move beyond the immediate situation in time and space to participate in a community which offers the universal ideals and the spiritual reality which unifies the cosmos. This is one approach to the religious dimension of commitment.

A second characteristic, introduced paragraphs ago, represents another reason to consider the religious dimension of commitment. This characteristic is seen in the human inability to fathom the depths of the cosmos. Less attractive as this limitation is to view, it is as painfully real as is the strength which was discussed above. Intellectual inquiry, upon discovering a solution to one question uncovers several more perplexing questions in the process.

In the specific and exacting field of the "hard" sciences, basic postulates and axioms are treated tenta-

tively, as the scientific method modifies or disconfirms what it recently had discovered and verified. Scientific discoveries are viewed as tentative rather than conclusive in any sense of the word. The scientist must work with the givens as reliable certainties until something occurs or is discovered which alters the premises that have been used in the past.

Humanity is continually building and modifying cognitive structures which help make personal sense of the constant flux in the surrounding world. The only permanence one knows is continuing change and the sense one makes of it within him/herself.

Experiencing constant change affects a person's relationship to the cosmos. Being unable to rely with absolute certainty upon specific learning of the past, either in the non-personal world or in personal relationships, the basic developmental task for a person, the establishment of basic trust is shaken. According to Erikson's developmental stages, this is the most elementary task in the growth and development of the individual. Basic trust is reflected in the way the individual sees him/herself and in the way the surrounding world appears. Normal development requires that this be attained to some degree in infancy, but it is also true that the degree to which one experiences basic trust varies considerably throughout life. Every human may regress temporarily to

partial mistrust whenever the world of his/her expectations has been shaken to the core.

It is at this point, when one's Assumptive World has been shaken or shattered, that organized religion offers support to the individual in the task of identifying his life situation at any moment. About this Erikson wrote:

There can be no question but that it is organized religion which systematizes and socializes the first conflict in life, because religion by way of ritual methods offers man a periodic collective restitution of basic trust which in adults ripens to a continuation of faith and realism.³⁷

It is recognized here that a contribution religion offers is an element of security provided by a system which makes an attitude of trust possible even in the midst of uncertainty and change. Religion in this sense comforts and supports one's emotional life and becomes a base for actions and attitudes toward other people and things even when they are not completely understood.

In keeping with the unified view of humanity established at the beginning of this paper, notice must also be taken of the way in which religion supports a person's cognitive structures as it does their emotional counterpart. Religious systems contain the potential for

³⁷Erik Erikson, "On the Sense of Inner Identity," in Robert Knight and Cyrus Friedman (eds.) *Psychoanalytic Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1954), I, 353.

contributing not only to the well being of one's emotional life, but to the health of one's cognitive processes as well. It is with this in mind that the following comment is noted:

. . . Wherever organized religion fails, there remains in human life a very basic void which is not taken care of by the mere denial of faith nor by an irrational overvaluation of substitute dogmas. He who believes that he can do without religion obligates himself to a new accounting for very basic human needs.³⁸

This quotation introduces a discussion of the need of assistance for humanity's rational element. This is offered in the form of a world view which acts as a shelter for the cognitive processes that protect one from the incomprehensibilities of existence and provide a framework for daily experiencing.

A developed world view becomes a personal cosmology which deals with the absurd elements of life and integrates these various elements into a system which interprets one's experiences in terms of a meaningful unity. This personal cosmology screens and sorts life experience and to the extent of its strength, shapes one's phenomenological world.

Some criteria for assessing a personal cosmology have been suggested by Hobbs. These are offered in the hope that they will be helpful in evaluating the personal

³⁸Ibid., p. 353.

cosmology Christianity assists modern Christians to create. They can serve as an instrument for assessing the commitments which are asked by religion of its contemporary participants. Hobbs suggested:

1. Above all a person's cosmology must be convincing to him.
2. It should overlap reasonably well with the cosmologies of the people with whom he associates (or else he may be declared psychotic and incarcerated).
3. It should be perceived by the individual as internally consistent--or relatively so.
4. It should contain some dissonances of either internal or external origin (this will encourage work to strengthen major propositions about himself and his world).
5. It should lead him into more intimate relationships with other people for without such sustenance the spirit withers.
6. It should have built in requirements for revision, for to live is to change and to remain static is to die.³⁹

And so this second human characteristic, the inability to fathom the depths of the cosmos, leaves one emotionally deficient, having a need for security and trust and rationally deficient, having a need for cognitive constructs which can deal with the ambiguity of life. The second characteristic, as the first, presents the need for something beyond what one can provide for oneself. The religious systems of the world have sought to present this extra dimension to humanity. They contain organized and developed methods presenting that which humanity needs to

³⁹ Nicholas Hobbs, "Sources of Gain in Psychotherapy," *American Psychologist*, XVII:11, (November 1962), 746f.

be satisfied--something beyond this time and place which pierces the depths of the cosmos, something to which one might commit oneself.

The Creation of Religious Systems

The previous discussion about two characteristics which encourage the religious dimension have shown why religious systems have been needed as a focus for an ultimate commitment. Supporting the definition of religion made initially in this paper it is acknowledged here that the various systems and institutions of religion have evolved under the direction of and by the efforts of humanity itself as a way was sought to bring the cosmos together in a form which gave it some degree of understanding and predictability. While it may be correct to state that religious systems arise out of human need, it would be superficial and misleading to indicate that that alone has been the moving force in the religious venture. There is a prior action of cosmic scope which precedes human need of which both faith and experience speak. This is the transforming power in the cosmos to which one can respond in total commitment. For Christians the symbol of the Christ speaks of this event. The creation of religious systems has been the human effort to capture, if only through symbolic rituals, gestures and forms, the

force which calls one to fuller being, the force which more and more inquirers admit to be beyond humanity itself.

Abraham Maslow was quoted earlier as representative of a number of psychologists who no longer can attribute all behavior to the satisfaction of antecedent conditions. They no longer are convinced that all behavior is motivated mechanistically, but believe some is a response to "that pressure toward fuller and fuller being." Also referring to the call forward, Dewey described "the power of an ideal" as a pull away from the actual toward the ideal. He goes so far to say that this may be called "God."⁴⁰ His contention being that ideals have a power in themselves which acts upon men. Wieman acknowledges the power which calls forward as a creative, transforming power that works through the creative interchange among persons in which each is transformed in a way that neither could foresee. This process he called the "source of human good" and awareness of it calls for a commitment which makes all other preliminary goals subordinate. Contributing to the developing thought about the call forward as these do, according to Cobb, "the clarification of the call forward as it functions in man's consciousness, in his total growth

⁴⁰John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 51. In Cobb, op. cit., p. 50.

and in the totality of nature was the peculiar achievement of Alfred North Whitehead."⁴¹

The effect of the religious dimension is that it does not leave one standing alone, having to create something which is worthy of an ultimate commitment. It is rather an extension, helping one to reach beyond oneself toward fulfillment. That very transcendence which is the focus of ultimate commitment is calling humanity forward. It is not necessary for one to make the "leap of faith" ultimate commitment demands by oneself. The leap is made in response to the call. One is grasped. Tillich expressed it in this way:

. . . the ultimate that grasps us will be powerful, demanding a decision of our whole personality. Yet is not produced by our own intellect or will. It is something which transcends our decision.⁴²

It is a responsible commitment to one's own movement in response to the call forward which makes possible the fulfillment and completion of one's humanity.

Humanity is hindered in responding to the call forward by the dissonance of existence. The experience of inner conflict, of futility or meaninglessness, of limitations and of loneliness conspire to mislead and misinform. Unsatisfied needs, frustration and inadequacy in

⁴¹Cobb, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴²Brown, op. cit., p. 10.

the face of life coalesce in a cycle which creates guilt and anxiety when humanity is afraid to and refuses to decide what it should live for. "The call forward is toward intensified life, heightened consciousness, expanded freedom, more sensitive love, but the way lies through the valley of the shadow of death."⁴³ That is a difficult journey.

The child enters maturity already experiencing incompleteness. It is in creative transformation that one can begin to find satisfaction and wholeness. Exposure to creative or transforming power through the spirit of life in another person often provides the opportunity of response which removes the blocks or evils barring one's becoming and assists one in the process of being created. The person then moves in the direction of wholeness, of what Zen calls Satori, of what Tillich calls "new being," of what Buber calls the "I-Thou" relationship and what Christianity in general has identified as God in human experience. At the point of response a person consciously enters into the process of becoming him/herself. As Camus wrote, "Man has not been endowed with a definitive nature . . . is not a finished creation, but an experiment of which he can be partly the creator."⁴⁴

⁴³Cobb, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁴Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Knopf, 1954), p. 106.

Sensing personal incompleteness and having the desire to go forward opens one to being in touch with the infinite. It is then that one can recognize the creative, transforming power coming through relationships in both the human and non-human world. It is then that a person, adding the power of will and choice to the call forward is able to make a faith commitment. Faith, in this case is identical with ultimate commitment. It is "the act by which the individual commits himself totally to something he believes will transform man as he cannot transform himself."⁴⁵ This kind of commitment of the whole self overcomes the world as it now exists and gives it a dimension and level of possibility beyond the compass of human ideals. The attempted expression of this sense of transforming power results in religious systems.

The Components and Function of Religious Systems

To help humanity speak of the ultimate commitment arising out of faith and experience, organized religion developed ways of expressing it. Religious practice has become a statement of life orientation. It is the function of rituals and symbols of faith to give powerful expression to this aspect of human experience. Religious systems become a way of expressing what humanity is. "Man needs a

⁴⁵Wieman, op. cit., p. 20.

convincing and authoritative statement of who he is and what he is living for. (Faith) . . . images provide this. To those for whom they are convincing, they provide a 'path of life.'⁴⁶

To possess a convincing statement of this magnitude, religious systems develop rituals to express the faith aspect of experience which has been meaningful in the lives of its participants. Christianity has developed ways of speaking of the recognition of the transforming power present in the world and of the incompleteness in human life that needs transforming by this spiritual power. Through it there is a way to confess the accrued guilt arising from what one has or has not done to become involved in the creative transformation which life needs and a way to dedicate one's life to being involved in the creative transformation which has become known through Jesus Christ. This is the cycle of a Christian service of worship: praise, penitence, supplication and dedication. The cycle becomes one of several ways in which commitment to the faith is expressed.

In addition to public worship, there are other rituals and symbols to organize all the participants around the object of faith. Inquiry through participation in study, discussion and preaching is encouraged to aid

⁴⁶Hutchison, op. cit., p. 122.

individual understanding. Self-examination is also part of the commitment sought so that one may know oneself and identify specific ways in which his/her life is or is not in communion with God. A final aspect of the commitment should be added. It is a commitment to action, action to change and create conditions which are in harmony with the demands of the transforming process.

In terms of commitment, the task of the elements of religion just discussed can be expressed in three ways. First it is to enable the person to discover and give an ultimate commitment which will overcome the conflict of warring parts within the self. Second, it is to assist the person in making the ultimate commitment which will restore the health of original experience, removing the stifling layers of conventional experience so that he/she can fulfill the potential of a unique individuality. And third it is to move the person to involvement in the process in such a way that there is freedom from any of the initial guilt of refusing to assume responsibility for the conduct of one's life.⁴⁷

SUMMARY

To conclude this discussion of the expression of religious commitment, it will be helpful to identify its

⁴⁷ Wieman, op. cit., p. 18.

overarching goals. They are to create unity and wholeness in the individual, to create a basic sense of trust which frees the creative power of the person from a defensive position and releases the thrust to growth, and to involve the person in the historical process of the transformation of humanity. The resolution of this commitment may evolve gradually or be captured in a spectacular moment of decision, but it involves a process of continued development with the content and meaning of that commitment changing and growing until mature selfhood is attained and the person is able to say, "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world."⁴⁸

Christianity developed the rite of baptism and the ritual of membership to give expression to a personal statement of commitment. However, not only must each generation restate the "wisdom of the ages" (in this case the truth about religious commitment and the nature of man) in its own terms, but each person must be able to make a statement.

There is growing concern over the inability of the church to involve and unite people together in making that statement. The traditional approach to and understanding of it need new expressions for them to live today. The conventional model of commitment used by the church

⁴⁸John 18:37

(i.e. rite of baptism and membership, attendance, contributions and involvement in projects) results in the formation of two groups. For one, there is no meaning in any of the "official" acts involved symbolic or otherwise. They express no positive affirmation for them. They have, in many cases become negative symbols and rites instead of simply meaningless or dead.

Another group become dependent upon the form because it has come to represent certainty that they are committed and as such are members assured they are living under the favor of their God. To these, discussion about removal of a name from active membership lists when there has been no participation in a number of years, is a threat of the highest degree and possibly constitutes a sinful act.

The official model of religious commitment means many things to some and practically nothing to others. The next chapter will look at the origins of these Christian expressions of commitment and will begin an analysis that will conclude with a discussion about how the official model can again attain positive meaning for its participants.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAJECTORY OF THE OFFICIAL MODEL OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

The concluding comments of the previous chapter have already developed a definition of the Official Model of religious commitment. Little more needs stating. Note should be made however, that the Official Model bears the form of a combination of rites. A rite may be defined as "a symbolic action which is religious by its very symbolism."¹ This definition will assume larger importance in the chapter following this with a discussion of the state of religious symbolism in the West today. As religious acts bearing specific symbolism, the Official Model immediately is recognized as part of the cult, the formal system of religious beliefs and practices. As an integral part of the Christian cult, the expression of religious commitment has changed form and content considerably with the passing of time. The purpose of this chapter is to survey and analyze the course of development for the current and official model of religious commitment and to view its role in the life of the contemporary Protestant Church.

¹Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 63.

CULTIC RITUAL AND THE ANCIENT MIND

Lessons about religious practices today can best be understood in the light given by an examination of cultic development in the mind and religion of humanity. A return to the roots of the Judeo-Christian heritage offers a convenient point of departure for such a venture.

Viewing magic as the attempt to bend the powers of the world to the human will through the use of words and gestures, it can be seen that magic was the base of primitive religions. This was a primary characteristic of religious thought and expression until the sixth century B.C. when axial existence began to appear. This period gave rise to a new role for rational action in the attempt to structure the universe into a meaningful system. This shift to a greater reflective consciousness initiated a tendency toward progressive rationalizing which has continued to the present. The Hebrews' exodus from Egypt however, which was their formative period, occurred in pre-axial times and reflects the predisposition of the ancient mind toward the use of what has been identified as magic.

Leaving Egypt, the Hebrew people took with them the influence of Egyptian magic. During their captivity they had absorbed specific religious practices from the Egyptians. Once they settled in Palestine they were influenced by the local Canaanite practices of religious

magic.² Of particular importance to this paper is the value placed upon the spoken word.

Words of blessing and cursing were considered to have magical powers.³ Numerous formulae were developed for the purpose of causing this effect to come into being. Knowing the name of someone was of even greater importance. It was felt that knowledge of a name might give the initiate magical power over its bearer if it were spoken. So it becomes important for both Moses and Jacob to ask the name of the powers which appeared to them.

This attitude toward the spoken word and the calling of names created special consideration to be given the name of God. Around "Yahweh" grew an intricate set of ideas, rituals and prescriptions. The name of God was elevated above all other names creating a general reluctance to use it. By the third century B.C. there was a general prejudice against speaking the name of God and it was no longer pronounced.⁴

The power assigned to the spoken word and gestures penetrates the pre-axial mind thoroughly as the way to maintain the status quo:

²Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 34f. See also Amos 5:26 and Hosea 8:5f.

³Ibid., p. 156.

⁴John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 434.

The daily life of the Israelites was replete with a great number of magical practices even though tradition has often disguised their character. In this way people thought they could recognize, influence or control the great forces of life in order to be masters of their own lives, protect themselves against danger and make the most of their existence.⁵

The primary purpose of the cult was the preservation of the existing order by obtaining the protection and the beneficence of Yahweh. To do this it sought: to show respect and pay homage to God; to reinforce a petition or express thanks for God's help; to appease God's wrath; or to present a freewill offering, an offering simply of gratitude. These practices of the Hebrew cult paralleled and incorporated the characteristics of the magic present in the country of their habitation.

In spite of much that can be said in defense of the cultic life of the amphictiony, its practice became foremost in the minds of its participants. This resulted in a mechanical repetition of the prescribed rituals attempting to coerce the divine will. True, at the center of the cultic life was the recalling of God's acts, giving it a more enlightened existence than the cult of the pagan religions, but by the eighth century B.C. the people's relationship to Yahweh was primarily ceremony and their participation in the cult was viewed as the fulfillment of the covenant obligation:

⁵Fohrer, op. cit., p. 34.

Covenant obligation, in so far as it had not lost meaning altogether, was concerned as a purely cultic matter, the demands of which could be met and in Israel's view were being met by elaborate ritual and lavish support of the national shrines.⁶

Then arose the prophets in an attempt to spiritualize the empty forms of cultic ritual and call the people of God from their wayward path. Typical of the prophetic call are the words from Micah 6:1-8 which conclude with the question: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" The point the prophets sought to make is easily captured: "The prophets . . . discerned that the holy could not be equated with the sacred in the cultic ritual. Holiness for them must be translated into social decency."⁷ This becomes the heart of the prophetic message. The prophets generated a confrontation with the formal practices of Jewish religion as they sought to discover their proper place in the people's relationship to God's presence and action.

The alarm raised by the prophets did not change the ancient belief that acting out the ritual of the cult consummated the act and accomplished its purpose. The prophets primarily served to raise questions. The ancient

⁶Bright, op. cit., pp. 242f.

⁷Walther Zimmerly, "The Law and the Prophets," in *Interpreters One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 1156.

mind was unable to realign its understanding of cultic action. Since the problem of uncleanness is a special concern to this paper, further attention will be given to cultic action regarding purification procedures.

Uncleanliness was understood in the time of Jesus to be the result of external contact with something unclean. The rites of purification or desecration were necessary when a person came in close contact with something unclean or sacred.⁸ In Mark 7:15 Jesus contradicts Mosaic Law (Lev. 2 and Deut. 14), "There is nothing outside of man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." This logion reverses the understanding of purification to state that it is the interior life which pollutes humanity, not contact with externals. Let this be examined closer.

This logion reverses the ancient understanding of purification. It cannot be integrated with anything in antiquity. It is incompatible with Greek thought because there the soul is always good and it also is incompatible with Jewish thought because there ritualism holds that uncleanness is external. It most likely is an authentic saying of Jesus. It completes the development in Jewish thought that the act, especially the "act" of avoidance, was not sufficient. It reinterprets the cultic concept of

⁸Fohrer, op. cit., p. 210.

purity and impurity from the standpoint of theology: the concept of obedience before God. A Christian interpretation of the content of this logion would insist that pollution is not caused by externals, but by man himself.

The formulation of the logion presupposes the recognition that ritual purification easily becomes external formalism. This realization also appears at Qumran at about this time. There the purification rituals are voided by the *Manual of Discipline*.⁹ The message is stated in such a way that the point becomes obvious: rituals do not possess magic results. Cleanliness is not *ex opere operato*, effective by ritual. This also is the record of scripture and completely removes the misconception of the authority and efficacy of cultic ritual. It is at this point that Christianity had its beginning and as the Christian church was organized in the next century it created an elaborate system of initiation rites. Those will now be examined.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICIAL MODEL

The ritual by which one becomes a member of the Community of Faith according to modern denominations has most often come into being as the denomination was being

⁹*The Manual of Discipline* (Col. 3, lines 2-6, 1Qf) as stated in a taped lecture of Dr. H. D. Betz, Dec. 17, 1970.

formed. In primitive Christianity this was not the case. There was no body of tradition on which the early Christians could build. That which today is known popularly as "joining the church" developed through the painful growth of the early church.

Origins of the Rites of Christian Initiation

The procedure by which one gained admission to the Christian Church came to be called "Christian Initiation." This phrase was not developed for some years and was given popular usage by the Latin Fathers. It was used earlier in the vocabulary of the pagan mystery religions and became useful in Christianity as a means of supporting the developing ritual of the church.¹⁰ It was used to show how initiation was necessary for Christianity just as it had been for the pagan religions earlier. The process was similarly in both an "entry into a mystery." For most of church history, Christian initiation has included Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Baptism admitted one to the ranks of the soldiers of Christ by merit of new birth as an adopted son, Confirmation represented growth as one became endowed with strength for the battle of Christian

¹⁰Aime Martimort, *The Signs of the New Covenant* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1963), p. 108.

life and the Eucharist represented nourishment along the way.¹¹

The Catechumenate. In apostolic times baptism was administered immediately following a profession of faith (Acts 2:41; 8:37). The procedure used was simple and plastic, being primarily an expansion and modification of established Jewish practices.¹² Initially there was no need for training the believer because converts were Jews or devout pagans associated with Judaism (perhaps the Godfearers mentioned in Acts). They had been preparing for this moment for years. They knew all about the Messiah, the Kingdom and the Promises. They knew what kind of response was expected to the demand for repentance and conversion that accompanied the preaching in the early church.

Shortly however, the influence of Hellenistic mystery religions began to be felt. Also, Christian preachers were being heard by people alien to the Jewish way of life. These two situations affected Christianity differently, but produced a common result. First, as some of the mystery of Hellenistic religion began to penetrate

¹¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), III, 480.

¹²Charles Guignebert, *The Early History of Christianity* (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 148.

Christianity it created a need for an orthodox line to be taught and passed on. Secondly, as the Christian message was preached outside the Jewish culture, its ideas were strange to the hearers. This called for educating the hearers about the Messiah who had come as Jesus Christ. Later, as the influence of Hellenistic mysteries became more pronounced, the "unknowing ones" came to include everyone, because all had to be initiated gradually into the Christian mystery in order not to profane it. It was quickly seen that a course of instruction could be a bulwark against unworthy members and a bridge from the world to the church.

A course of instruction developed rapidly. Late in Acts (18:25) Apollos was instructed and Theophilus was instructed (Luke 1:4) by the turn of the first century. There was no regularity or uniformity among these early catechisms, but they developed quickly into a formal course. Hippolytus spoke of an organized Catechumenate in Rome by about A.D. 220.¹³

To become a Catechumen, a candidate was presented to the leaders of the church by a member who guaranteed the person's good intentions. One had to show that he/she was not engaged in any business that would be incompatible

¹³Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 40-50, cited in Karl Bihlmeyer, *Church History* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1958), I, 117.

with the Christian life. If accepted into the Catechumenate, one was considered a Christian, but not a "fidelis."¹⁴ They were called *κατηχούμενοι* (*κατηχεῖν*, to instruct) or *audientes* since they were hearers or students of the saving truths. They were allowed to attend worship services, but were not allowed to be present during the serving of the Eucharist.¹⁵ The course was generally taught by presbyters or deacons called catechists and lasted from two to three years.

For those nearly prepared for baptism the Lenten season brought the memorization of the Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer, both with an explanation phrase by phrase. After a public examination, if one passed, baptism was administered.¹⁶

Baptism. The idea of baptism springs from several sources in the Judeo-Christian heritage. Perhaps the importance of baptism and the disappearance of circumcision in the Christian church speaks to the successful efforts of the prophets to spiritualize the ceremonial washing of the Jews. Baptism with water was the means of entry into the Christian community from Pentecost onward.

Remembering the earlier discussion on cultic

¹⁴William O'Shea, *Sacraments of Initiation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 21.

¹⁵Schaff, op. cit., II, 256f. ¹⁶Ibid., III, 486.

practices it will be recalled that the Old Testament ceremonial washing was based on the Mosaic law of the clean and unclean. Persons could become defiled by contact with what was impure. These defilements had to be washed away before one could participate in the life of the cult. This was refined by the prophets who spoke of the necessity of washing and of being clean not just from ritual faults, but from sins. Isaiah (1:16) reversed the pattern of thought when he said "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean" and then added "remove the evil of your doings."

Ezekiel went further than any other prophet in the process of spiritualizing the ceremonial washing. He announced the coming of a new washing which would purify the heart as well as the body (36:25f): "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses . . . a new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you." The association of this washing with the Christian baptism was especially strong because of the outpouring of the spirit.

The Jewish rite of a bath of the proselytes is also another precedent for Christian baptism. This bath was the ritual by which a convert was actually joined to Israel to become a member of the holy nation. It was preceded by a catechesis which consisted of instruction in the faith of Israel and a test of sincerity of the candidate. A reading

from the Torah accompanied the rite which was administered by another.¹⁷

Peter's response to the question at Antioch, "What must we do?" clearly states what became a procedural requirement for admission to the church. Repentance was a precedent condition for baptism. The candidate must repent and be cleansed from sin before he may be baptized. The baptism was then a washing symbolic of the cleansing required. Justin Martyr, writing near A.D. 155 about admission to baptism stated:

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true and undertake to be able to live accordingly are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them.¹⁸

Following the catechism the baptism took place, usually on Easter eve and on Pentecost. This continued to be common until the ninth century. The baptism itself was a simple act. Besides the trinitarian formula, the Bible and the Didache of the first century mention only the use of water. At the beginning of the third century however, it was becoming complicated. Tertullian and Hippolytus mention other various symbolic acts accompanying or preceding the ceremony. These include, "signing with the

¹⁷O'Shea, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁸Justin Martyr, *Apology* I.61, cited in John C. Durrell, *The Historic Church* (New York: Kraus, 1969), p. 141.

cross, renunciation of Satan, exorcism, exorcistic anointing, profession of faith, baptismal vows and anointing with the 'oil of thanksgiving.'¹⁹

In these few paragraphs related to baptism it has been clearly shown how it has changed from simple beginnings. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that by the fourth century, large numbers were postponing baptism until the end of life because it had come to represent a powerful mystery. Many apparently felt that there was great peril to their lives if they should do a wrongful act after receiving it.²⁰ Thus baptism moved from ceremonial washing to a heartfelt symbolic act, to a mysterious power which could imperil one's life.

Confirmation. The first complete description of this rite comes from Hippolytus' *The Apostolic Tradition*.²¹ It originally was administered in immediate succession to baptism, sealing the candidate with the seal of the spirit. Following this the baptized took part in the Eucharistic liturgy.

The rite itself initially consisted of the laying on of the hands by the Bishop and the anointing of the

¹⁹Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 118.

²⁰Schaff, op. cit., III, 484.

²¹O'Shea, op. cit., p. 56.

candidate with oil. The only passage in the Bible in which the laying on of hands is distinguished from baptism occurs in Acts (8:14-17). This reference has an uncertain meaning. The anointing with oil cannot be supported by the New Testament, although bearing the seal of the owner was the custom of that time. It appears that the designation of the act as Confirmation appeared first in the fifth century in Gaul to connote perfection or completion. Prior to that time the rite had been called different names. Whatever its early usage, it became the second sacrament in the Latin Church in the fifth century at the Council of Orange.²² The fifth century was also the time when baptism came to be widely administered to babies. Infant baptism and confirmation as a separate sacrament developed together.²³

Confirmation was not questioned seriously as a sacrament until Luther and Calvin claimed it was purely of ecclesiastical origin. The Council of Trent emphatically stated its necessity, but the Protestant Reformation removed it from the sacraments of the reformatory churches. According to Catholic theory, confirmation seals and completes the grace of baptism. In contrast, the Lutheran view suggests that it is a subjective complement to infant

²² Martimort, op. cit., p. 140.

²³ Schaff, op. cit., II, 255 and III, 487f.

baptism where the person renews the vows made by his parents and assumes responsibility for himself.

Of doubtful Biblical origin, but supported by much tradition, some protestant churches maintain the ritual of confirmation as a convenient and useful way of involving the individual in the process of assuming responsibility for his/her own life. Its preservation is pragmatic, but whether it serves its function is doubtful.

Beginnings of Local Church Membership

Searching the development of local church membership ultimately raises the question about the origin of the concept of "church." Lest this become an endless tangent, a limited number of comments will address the question in order that it not be totally ignored.

The early Christians remained attached to the Jewish faith and practiced its forms of worship. The future brought them an image of the Kingdom, not the Church.²⁴ They were prepared for a quick return of their Lord to establish the Kingdom of which he spoke. The kingdom about which Jesus spoke was not discussed in structural or organizational terms, but rather a condition of relationship to God. Only once (Matthew 16:18) do the Gospels indicate that Jesus used the word "church." The

²⁴Guignebert, op. cit., p. 126.

context of that saying, if it is truly authentic, cuts across the grain of all his other comments about the future. The future would usher in the eschatological kingdom and bring about the end of the age. "Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" offers little support to the idea that Jesus consciously founded the church or instructed his disciples to do so. True, the Great Commission sent his followers abroad, but it was to "preach the gospel to every living creature" not to organize congregations wherever they went.

At the same time, however, while occupied with the coming of the kingdom, the Apostles did do certain things to execute the Great Commission and to express their faith. Unconsciously they were laying the groundwork for the future church. As time passed and the Kingdom did not come, pragmatic reasons were forcing groups of believers to organize. Not having an authoritative directive, they looked back to the apostolic tradition to discover what they should teach and preach and how they should do it. The apostolic tradition became the supreme test of all ecclesiastical decisions.

While expecting the parousia, they became dependent upon divine guidance. They existed in a state of flux, truly between the times. They lived in great expectation of the revelation of the kingdom. While waiting for

guidance into the kingdom and sharing their common rites, the sense of community increased.

A community of faith tends to develop wherever people embrace a common hope whether it is for the present or immediate future. Those embracing the Lord Jesus could not long continue in the synagogue or the pagan temple. They eventually would be cast out for their unorthodox views or their common interest and experience with others like themselves thus bringing an abandonment of their earlier religious expressions. Together they would share a common prayer, a common initiatory rite and a rite of communion with each other and their Lord. These became distinguishing marks of this group as they met together.

Local gatherings tended to be the result of several Christians living in proximity, but there was a general sense of a universal order emerging, "one Lord, one faith, one birth." Their unity was expressed by their communal living. A universal brotherhood was the focus, not the local congregation.

It is felt that the transportation of the Christian hope from Palestine to Greek soil and its universalization gave birth to the idea of the Church.²⁵ The Greek, *εκκλησία*, meaning assemblage, gathering, meeting or congregation came to develop the connotations which still

²⁵Ibid., p. 127.

belong to the universal church.

The Pauline concept of the union of all Christians in God was well established by the second century. No local church could exist in a state of isolation from the whole body. They were all united in God. They had not been united by organization and an outside observer would perceive only local churches, but to the expectant community they were one.

A common community did not eliminate the irregularity and variation among the different groups although they did tend to evolve in the same direction. In addition to their common rites, hopes and beliefs, several other factors tended to unite them: religious associations or fraternities were a common part of all sections of the Roman Empire;²⁶ there was the necessity of presenting a united front to hostile groups; all shared the difficulty of making a living while waiting for the Kingdom; recognition grew regarding the lack of authority and disorder which began to result from the absence of all discipline.

As these difficulties were experienced, organi-

²⁶Models of organization existed in both Gentile and Jewish religions and both alternately influenced forming Christian groups. The Hellenistic religions had their own elected officials and their own funds, supplied by subscriptions and supervised by special trustees. The Jews of the Dispersion still gathered in synagogues which in general had the same organization. See *ibid.*, pp. 130f.

zation began to emerge and written instructions were prepared to standardize doctrine and practice, settle disputes and to encourage those suffering persecution. Organization of the membership was initiated because of heretics and schismatics. Prior to the development of controversy a record of membership was not important.

"Membership" was a term secondary to fellowship.²⁷ To belong to a group of Christians was to have fellowship. When one was in fellowship he received all the privileges of participation in the community. *Kοινωνία* was the expression in Greek, meaning communion, close relationship, fellow-feeling. *Koinonia* became the model for expressing the close relationship among the followers and all of them with their Lord.

When problems developed because of wrong belief or disputes, it became necessary to be more precise in stating a person's affiliation with the Christians than in earlier years. Church records became an outgrowth of the Catechumenate.

After passing an initial examination of intention, a candidate for fellowship (or membership) inscribed his name to the list of those already belonging and was accepted as a Catechumen. This is the first mention of

²⁷ Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship In The First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), p. 24.

written records identifying membership in the group of Christians. In this way a local group could identify its own from memory and from record.

A newcomer however, presented a problem. How could his integrity be determined? Initially previous relationships were not too important because exclusion from one congregation did not mean a general exclusion. In a short time though, as the records of the Council of Nicaea show, a ban in one location came to hold for all congregations.²⁸ Letters of transfer became necessary to indicate that a newcomer should be admitted to the koinonia of a local congregation.

This was the close of the Apostolic Age. The large social welfare projects, especially in urban churches began to attract irresponsible characters. This was however, a minor problem of the church for in the latter writings of the New Testament, the battle of "sound doctrine" and "good confession" against "false doctrine," "myths," "what is falsely called knowledge," and "heresy" become a dominant concern. Heretics were of course excluded from the fellowship so letters became required of newcomers to insure their orthodoxy.

These written documents varied in name and char-

²⁸John Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London, 1957), pp. 359f., cited in Elert, op. cit., p. 127.

acter. The oldest form known is the *systatica (grammatica sustatika)* or Letters of Commendation which are mentioned by Paul (II Cor. 3:1) who wrote one for the deaconess Phoebe (Rom. 16:1, I Cor. 16:3) and mentioned others.²⁹

The first formal communication were Letters of Peace which were written by the Confessors who had endured the Decian persecution in behalf of the lapsed. Because the appearance of the name of a Confessor carried a high emotional charge, immediately after Fellowship was granted to the bearer the certificate was replaced by a Letter of Fellowship according to the Council of Elvira in A.D.

306.³⁰ Later these two types of communication came to designate social position. The Letter of Peace was given to those who might need assistance, but the Commendation was reserved for travelers better off.

At the Council of Carthage in A.D. 345 it was stated that no person could commune in another congregation without a letter from his bishop. This regulation came to serve several purposes. Of greatest concern in most circles was the preservation of the orthodox confession. Requiring a letter of transfer insured that its boundaries were protected from transgression. In addition to the privilege of communion, the letter served to inform the local bishop of the newcomer's presence so that he might

²⁹Elert, op. cit., pp. 130f.

³⁰Ibid., p. 131.

address pastoral care to that person. Fellowship by letter became a key linking not only individual Christians to groups, but also one group to another as a sign of unity. It served as a sign that special altar fellowship existed between the congregations. Local church membership came into existence in response to some very real needs the early church felt as it aged.

Structures For Church Thought

Church thought like church organization came under the influence of the Hellenistic religions as it moved out of its Jewish origins. Both incorporation and reaction occurred within Christianity because of this influence. The result was that by the fourth century in the words of one writer ". . . the church with some difficulty is recognized as the community of apostolic times, if it is recognizable at all."³¹

By this time, instead of a small sect within Judaism, a structured religious organization existed to which belonged people of various race and social positions. This medley, coming together, raised the name of the Christian Church.

In addition to the philosophical-religious doctrines of the Greco-Roman milieu, the church's reflections

³¹Guignebert, op. cit., p. 122.

upon its own condition effected change within it. By this time a system of dogmatics as expressed by a Rule of Faith was developing which rested upon the opinion of the majority, as interpreted by competent authorities. This system asked to be received as the revealed and perfected explanation of the world, life and destiny. Church theologians dedicated themselves to the task of plumbing its depths and improving its consistency. Three of the structures which changed in this development will now be examined. They are the profession of faith, the sacramental idea in baptism and the confirmation of commitment.

The profession of faith. Judaism holds that every Jew is born into God's covenant with the people of Israel and membership in the community does not depend on credal affirmations of a formal character.³² Membership was not a birthright in Christianity. It felt the need of an expression of faith from the beginning. Initially the statement varied greatly from place to place, but always preceded baptism. It was made in response to the kerygma. Hearing the gospel, if one believed it, one made a profession of faith.

Quickly, for those who decided to become Christians, a catechism developed so that the profession of

³²Alexander Altman, "Articles of Faith," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), III, 654.

faith could embody knowledge of the chief truths passed on by the apostles. The catechism changed the profession of faith from a verbalized response of the individual to the Kerygma to a recitation of the material which had been taught. Irenaeus and Tertullian called this prepared confession of faith the *κανών της πίστεως, regula fidei* or rule of faith. By the second century at Rome the Apostle's creed had become a true expression of the faith.³³ The Christian conception of faith has undergone a tortuous development as it has accompanied the institutionalization of the church.

In the earliest church, faith was so involved with the actual experience of the Christ that rational elements were minimal. Faith was based on an experiential level. With the passing of time, faith took on a more rational element. This occurred to the extent that at the time of the Pastoral Epistles' writing, whose *Sitz-im-Leben* is the second century church, one can safely say that faith is closely identified with "assent to right doctrine." At the same time another level was becoming important in which "assurance" or "confidence" became the critical factor (Heb. 11:1). Both expressions continued to be discussed.

Thomas Aquinas' theology incorporated both elements of faith. Assent seemed to him to be more crucial and as

³³Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 120.

his influence was felt upon the church, this understanding filtered through to the laymen. Its essence came to be agreement with the Church's teachings. The Church's authority became the Rule of Faith by which one's faithfulness was judged. Martin Luther raised a question.

Luther's concern was to make faith more than assent to church teaching and emphasized the need of an individual's confidence or trust in God. Development of this logic devaluated the Church's authority and the opposition led eventually with other things into the Protestant Reformation.

Luther's view of faith was never unanimously endorsed by all who called themselves protestants and soon some again leaned toward agreement to stated propositions. The emergence of science and rationalism tended to influence thinking even further in that direction. It was a hazardous direction to travel because science and rationality often challenged and defeated religion. The resulting adjustments again focused faith more clearly on confidence of experience.

As on the continent, in America, the profession of faith developed in many forms. Perhaps in the new world the greatest resistance to the formulated profession occurred in the northeastern United States among the Puritans. There knowledge of the faith and a moral life were not adequate for membership. If these two elements

had remained the bases for church membership, baptism would have never troubled New England. By 1640 however, candidates for membership had to relate the process of their conversion to the assembled congregation.³⁴ A "morphology of conversion" developed which became a yardstick for measuring the faithful. Those who did not relate a convincing account were not admitted to membership. This presented a major problem for the church.

The congregationalism of that day depended, for the continuing life of the church, on the hereditary growth of faith. The children as heirs to the covenant through the membership of their parents would be baptized, learn their catechism, observe the faith of their fathers and through church discipline and hearing the Word preached would ultimately qualify for communion. A required regenerative experience raised a conflict which was only partially solved by the Half-Way Covenant of 1662. According to this covenant, all one had to do to be a half-way member (member without communion) was to renew the covenant made by his parents.

The tension over the form of the candidates' profession of faith continues today in institutionalized religion. The forms of the spirit's expression in one

³⁴ Robert Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 276f.

generation become the structures for its continuation in the succeeding generation. Spontaneity is lost and experiential piety becomes routinized. When the spirit moves anew, so do the saints. Just as the Puritans were called out of Anglicanism, so the New Lights were called out of Puritanism, and so moves the Spirit today, ever refining the profession of faith from the liturgical recitation of the formulated creed to a verbalized expression of an experienced response to the kerygma. This is a possibility for the religious commitment of modern Christians.

The sacramental idea in baptism. Since its acceptance as admission into fellowship with the gathered community, baptism has become for the catholics the "door to the sacraments" and for protestants the prerequisite for local church membership and communion. It is standard procedure for every group of Christians today although its common usage is often the point at which likenesses end. Its form and its meaning have come to vary considerably from group to group. Different understandings created its various forms and in turn various forms have caused even more understandings of the rite. Such variation currently exists that for many it has ceased to be a meaningful part of the Christian religion. This has far reaching implications for one's ability to make a religious expression

of commitment. This situation demands a restatement of baptismal theology and a more helpful interpretation of its role in the whole schema of Christian initiatory rites. Here however, neither the metaphysical implications nor the necessity of the sacrament will be debated. Rather, this is an attempt to bring about an understanding of the sacramental idea expressed in Baptism historically.

As Christianity began to emerge from Judaism, taking with it a nucleus of sacred rites, it began a refining process. One writer has said:

The ritual development of Christianity advances step by step. . . . It began with very simple practices, all taken from Judaism: baptism, the breaking of bread, the imposition of hands, prayer and fasting. Then a meaning more and more profound and mysterious was assigned to them. They were amplified and gestures familiar to the pagans were added; they were loaded with the large interests, for example, embraced in the rites of the Greek and Oriental mysteries, and thus charged as it were, with the ancient formidable power of magic. This work was initiated as soon as the apostolic faith was transported from Palestine to Greek soil. It was in process uninterruptedly during the whole time that the new religion was struggling with its rivals.³⁵

Living beside the mystery religions Christianity was influenced by them as the early Hebrew religion had been by surrounding peoples in Palestine. Christianity was perhaps more fertile soil for the influence of the mysteries than they were themselves. This is due to the fact that it was the first mystery to have an effectively

³⁵ Guignebert, op. cit., p. 121.

supernatural content in the strict sense of the word.³⁶ The Christian mystery was the only one which, in place of an association with the natural powers, claimed a redemptive alliance with the sovereign God who had come to earth to free mankind from the rebellious powers. The Hellenistic mystery easily influenced Christianity's development because of its own tendency.

In the Greek, the μυστήριον referred to the secret or that which was not yet known.³⁷ The secret was hidden and protected by the members and revealed to candidates only after they had undergone initiation. The secret of the religion was not to be disclosed to non-initiates.

Responding to the concept of "mystery," Christianity inserted a new meaning to the mystery, interpreting it as God's secret about the salvation of men which was revealed in Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-5, 9; Col. 1:26 and 4:3). This mystery was revealed in Christ, but only to those who believed. Due to the secrecy surrounding the ritual of Christianity only a member of the fellowship, one of the initiated, could fully understand the mystery for it was only then that the person could fully share in the knowledge and ritual of the religion.

³⁶ Bouyer, op. cit., p. 183.

³⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 531.

This had changed from the earliest community in which baptism was the sign of belief and was the door to fellowship. It was natural that baptism as the only way one could gain admission to the fullness of the mystery should occupy a special place in the life of the community. Influenced by the Hellenistic mysteries it quickly came to have a numinous and esoteric interpretation. For those outside the community and increasingly for its members, baptism became the key to understanding the Christian mystery.

From being the gateway to the Greek concept of mystery, baptism, under Latin influence came to have new connotations. For instance, the Vulgate sometimes uses *sacramentum* for the Greek *μυστήριον* and sometimes *mysterium*.³⁸ Either word suggests different meanings than the original Greek. This gave rise to the etymological ambiguity of "sacrament" and also contributed to its uncertain essence.

In Roman law *sacramentum* was used to describe a legal religious sanction in which a person placed life or property in the hands of the supernatural powers who insured justice and kept solemn agreements or covenants. It also came to have a military significance as an oath of

³⁸ Bernard Piault, *What is a Sacrament* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963), p. 41.

allegiance which was sworn under a formula having a religious connotation. Tertullian applied the term to baptism to indicate that it was an oath renouncing idolatry for allegiance to the service of Jesus Christ.³⁹

The rite of baptism incorporated a number of meanings as it bound together the influence of the Greek mysteries and the Latin oath with Christianity's own unique substance. Under the influence of Rome it became known as a sacrament by the third century. The merger can be seen in a statement written by Clement of Alexandria: "a mystery is a representation of a sacred reality by material signs, incomprehensible to unbelievers."⁴⁰

By the third century baptism was complicated. The spirit of Hellenistic mysteries permeated it. By Tertullian's time baptism alone created the "mysterious bonds" between the believer and his Lord. Baptism had been given such mystical powers that it frightened people. There was such peril involved in violating the requirements submitted to in baptism that many considered it more prudent to wait until near death to be baptized lest grace be forfeited by accident.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.15 as cited in Piault, op. cit., p. 43.

⁴¹ Guignebert, op. cit., p. 150.

After A.D. 313 the discipline of the early church weakened as it became fashionable to be a Christian. A combination of several factors further affected the ritual of baptism. Large numbers made it impossible to give the meticulous instruction the early converts received. Many eager to join the faith of the emperor came to the church. Missionary efforts evangelized barbarians, resulting in baptism *en masse*. The meager preparation of catechumens was made up for by adding to the complexity of the ritual. The Roman world was breaking up, all around were signs of disintegration, the church continued to be disturbed by heretics and partisans and in the face of all these things it attempted to maintain itself. The demands of the situation along with ignorant clergy resulted in a collection of legends, of *sacra* (operations of magic) and meaningless formulas by Charlemagne's time.⁴²

Using various means the church had well established itself by the Middle Ages. Those years were remarkably religiously oriented since religion and life were so intimately connected. Religious instruction was more a matter of formation than of mere information. There were no catechisms *per se*, but the child was trained through ordinary preaching, participation in worship, by the general atmosphere of society, by the pictures on the

⁴²Ibid., pp. 208f.

walls, the stained glass in the churches, and reading lessons in school based on the Psalter.⁴³ The whole society was baptized as infants and at the proper age, their conscious initiation into Christian living took place at school, in church and in the family.

During the medieval era a unanimity developed around the church's teaching of baptism. It had become more uniform and more consistent. The church by that time had established that the sacrament of Baptism actually contained and conferred grace on those who put no obstacle in its way. In practice, this was a near return to the ancient understanding of ritual with the act itself being efficacious.

In the sixteenth century however, reformers were not to let this teaching rest unchallenged. Martin Luther reversed the church's teaching with his doctrine of justification by faith alone which he attempted to combine with the belief in the necessity of baptism. Ulrich Zwingli completely denied the necessity of baptism, seeing it as only a sign admitting one to Christian community.⁴⁴ The third major reformer of the era, John Calvin, suggested

⁴³Arthur McCormack, *Christian Initiation* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1969), p. 138.

⁴⁴F. L. Cross (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 126.

that baptism was efficacious for the elect since they alone had the faith without which the rite was worthless.

The flux these various positions caused was resolved by the rationalism of the eighteenth century which contributed toward a general indifference for baptism within most churches. An exception perhaps is the Catholic church which maintains its position of the granting of grace to those who receive the sacrament.

The present air of indifference toward baptism generally applies with the exception of infant baptism. There is a general question about the custom of presenting children for baptism from homes where there is little prospect of their having a Christian upbringing. The position in which the Christian church finds itself in Western culture today with regard to the meaning of this rite will be shown in the next chapter.

Confirming a commitment. The separation of confirmation from baptism occurred about the time that infant baptism came to be a commonly accepted practice. It tended to be deferred until an appropriate age when the child could assume responsibility for its life.

For the protestant churches not having a regular catechism class, it became an opportunity to teach about the Christian faith. For those not using the time of

confirmation for instruction, it continued to be ritual preceding membership in the church at the proper age.

Unfortunately, if the catechumenate of the early church became a place for "learning the faith," the typical confirmation process was no different. It became an opportunity, perhaps a last chance, to instruct the candidate in the elements of the Christian faith.

There is a tremendous opportunity in the confirmation class to remedy some of the problems arising out of the uncertain milieu in which the rites of Christian initiation appear. This is a period of time which provides an opportunity to clarify some of the misconceptions that surround the cult of the church. It is an opportunity to suggest an understanding of what religious commitment truly implies.

The opportunity has seldom been taken, however. Following the reformation there was a "siege mentality" which caused this period of instruction to focus on polemical, intellectual and legalistic matters. Following that era came the threat of the eighteenth century rationalists which created a dogmatic response from the church. Finally, in the nineteenth century the church was on the defensive from materialism and scientific agnosticism. Today it responds to the challenges of humanism and secularism.

Religious instruction which was on the defensive

typically consisted of memorizing abstract formulae which hardly reached the mind and certainly did not reach the heart. Cognitive content, just as in the days of the early church, became important to disseminate. No doubt this type of instruction assisted in the production of many devout Christians who worked and served the church well and lived daily in the expression of their faith. They were the products of an old system. The grace of God and the individuality of human personality often compensate for human error.

The content of religious instruction for confirmation today is perhaps less defensive, less aggressive, but tends still to convey an idea that the subject is abstract, untouchable and unreal. It has become increasingly clear that for countries like our own that operate on the basis of Christian or post-Christian modes of thought, that it is impossible to regard Christian religion as a body of philosophical or intellectual or cultural truths.⁴⁵

It is no longer adequate for confirmation classes or catechisms to rely upon cognitive instruction in the elements of faith or the structures of religion.

45 McCormack, op. cit., p. 149.

CULTIC RITUAL AND THE MODERN MIND

Primitive humanity's dependence upon magic is not part of the modern era. Modern people do not rely on the ritual of the cult to explain the forces of life and death and to provide protection from them. Likewise, the Christian rites of initiation to the modern mind no longer are important simply because they are part of the cult. Furthermore, no longer is it possible to explain their existence rationally to modern man. As it was stated in the section above, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible in post-Christian society to justify Christianity and its various elements as a body of philosophical, or intellectual or cultural truths. Many are cut off from the wonder of mystery and the power of the supernatural. Cultic ritual speaks of things foreign to their power of expression.

The current milieu has found many in the position of having no reason to participate in the ritual. This is a factor contributing to the crisis of faith which exists in the Western world today. The result of disillusionment in traditional religious forms and expressions can be seen in the attempts being made to find a new source to satisfy those same needs which are now unmet. Humanity has to fill in the emptiness which grows when the old forms become meaningless shells. Louis Bouyer has written:

When man loses the faith that animated his rituals he comes to regret this loss. If he does not miss the substance of the religion, he at least misses the emotion and the feeling of exaltation that were associated with it. He then seeks either by reviving the past or by instituting new techniques with a psychological basis inspired by the ancient rites, to recover some of that psychological atmosphere which surrounded them, without giving credence to the original beliefs that had been connected with them.⁴⁶

Perhaps the best organized attempts to accomplish this task was seen in the pageantry of Nazism in its attempt to restore to the masses the emotional drive that accompanies their religious convictions. Note the displays staged by Hitler at the *Sportspalast* in an effort to inspire and to move into action. Another example of these attempts is the Russian military cemetery at Treptow in the suburbs of Berlin with funerary chapel, a perpetual flame, a book of the dead, an altar and colossal statues in an attitude of prayer.⁴⁷

For the rites of Christian initiation to relate to modern people they must be seen in terms of what is experienced as real and is believed to be true. This has resulted in an emphasis on the ethical aspects of life and a deemphasis on the cultic. Emphasis is upon the conduct of life with each other and there is a sublimation of the need to express a relationship with the transcendent

⁴⁶Bouyer, op. cit., p. 93.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 94.

quality of life. Modern humanity avoids the use of symbols as much as possible.

Due to a limited stature however, the beliefs about life that humanity has expressed have always had to be expressed symbolically. Now many feel unable to express themselves in those terms; part of them is not being expressed.

Historically there never has been a religion, pagan or otherwise, that did not use material signs and rites in its approach to the transcendent God.⁴⁸ A religion without rites has been an impossibility. The need for symbolic action springs from the very core of human nature and it controls the religious life.

Instead of attempting to abolish rites or symbols on the basis that they have lost their meaning, the next chapter will conduct a close examination to show that their meaning has only been extenuated by the poor use which has been made of them and that the archetypes which created them still have life in the modern psyche as in the ancient.

⁴⁸Piault, op. cit., p. 10.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH SEEKING RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT:

A CRISIS OF SYMBOLS

While scholars immerse themselves in unending analysis and discussion about the meaning of symbols for contemporary life, the need to resolve some of the ambiguity surrounding everyday life surfaces conspicuously in those who are in desperate search for adequate forms to express the meaning of their existence. Some bring this need to the Church.

Still representing a link between the absurdity present in finite existence and the universal meaning of the cosmos, the Church is asked to speak to the human situation. The "Will to Meaning" described by Frankl reaches out of what has become a vacuous situation to the herald of Good News, the agency of divine salvation, the Christian Church. For modern humanity the Truth discovered there is unreal and unpalatable. Supplementing its irrelevant statements, responses made to questions which are being asked have neither the power nor the strength to assure. A modern person finds little to assuage his/her needs in the language or form of the Church's symbols or symbolic actions. It is a question of relevance. Despite its use in recent years as a superficial category for

simplistic dialogue, relevance continues to be a basic point of departure for analytic discussions.

Relevance implies connection with something of value now. The matter has two facets, introduced by the concepts of external and internal relevance. External relevance is how well the church tunes in to the problems, processes and procedures of the world. It is how cogent the church's beliefs are to those outside and how responsive the church's actions are for the world's needs. External relevance is how well the church is connected to matters external to its own community. On the other hand, internal relevance is related to how well the church is tuned in to its own heritage and self-understanding. It is how cogent the church's beliefs are to its own members; how well its teachings and imperatives relate to the life experiences of its members. For healthy functioning, both are necessary.¹ For modern humanity, the area of concern in this chapter has neither. This chapter examines the position of symbols.

SYMBOLS IN CRISIS

Entering the church one is called upon to use and

¹For models of external and internal relevance respectively see, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) and Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

cultivate symbols which have traditionally expressed the meaning of Christianity. For modern humanity, the symbols it is called upon to use are unable to carry the meaning it seeks to convey. They sometimes have no meaning beyond themselves. They do not belong to this time. Others object and declare the symbols of Christianity are alive and meaningful. Then the truth of a remark made by T. S. Eliot that we do not all inhabit the same world begins to be known.

Different Frames of Reference

The major revolutions of the Western mind have involved movement from a variety of primitive world pictures through the Aristotelian and Newtonian frames of reference into yet a third, the framework of relativity and quanta. Cailliet, who suggested this movement also noted that each transition involved a cultural crisis as parts of the society changed more rapidly than others.²

Some individuals express a primitive world view in their understanding of their place in the universe. For them a common world view made a daily ritual of routine tasks like washing and fire building, in addition to pure

²Stanley R. Hopper, "The Future of Religious Symbolism--a Protestant View," in F. Ernest Johnson (ed.) *Religious Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), pp. 233f.

ceremonial observance of the order of the universe. In primitive society each generation was completely absorbed in the world view of the older group through myth and the ritual of initiation.

In the medieval era the power of the church brought men to their knees together to enact regularly, if not to consider, their participation in the divine cosmos. As the medieval world picture was threatened, it was woven into a complex metaphysical, authoritative defense to secure its continuation.

A medieval view continues for some while others have adopted the framework of relativity and quanta. In modern society, common ground supporting a frame of reference is absent. Neither the myth and ritual of the primitive mind nor the power of the medieval church enforce conformity. In modern society such common ground is lost. Persons find expression of the ultimate in various quasi-religious forms: the state, *Kultur*, scientific truth, a metaphysical "All," and a large number of "isms." The current milieu is a wide variety of systems through which symbols are interpreted.

The pluralism which this milieu reveals is a minor part of the larger process known as secularization. The effect of pluralism with regard to symbols is of significance. One's symbol set is structured by one's view of reality and in turn one's reality is interpreted and

structured by one's symbol set. Identity depends on one's symbol set, as a person defines himself in relation to his view of reality. Different symbol sets interpret reality differently and no two symbol sets interpret reality the same, just as no two languages are perfectly translatable into one another. This is important because in opting for a different symbol set, a previous set loses value. Secularization and the resulting pluralism calls into question the meaning of the symbols of the church.

The current milieu prevents us from sharing a few, historic, "charged" symbols that carry the same meaning for all. The loss of universal symbols is experienced consciously as a loss of cohesion, unity, but also threatens one's unconscious orientation toward life.

A Symbol-Weak Western Culture

Pluralism containing different frames of reference is aided by the absence in Western culture of dominant symbols. Pluralism has been fostered by the fact that Western culture is symbol weak. Identifying this situation are comments like May's that "contemporary man suffers from the deterioration and breakdown of the central symbols in modern Western culture."³ Societies have always had

³Rollo May, "The Significance of Symbols," in his *Symbolism in Religion and Literature* (New York: Braziller, 1960), p. 22.

central cultural symbols which characterized them. These symbols penetrated every aspect of the culture--art, science, education, religion. They represented a world view which gave form and unity to the culture. Without them the culture was unable to express anything beyond itself. It could not transcend its immediate situation. These are primarily in conflict in Western culture today.

Other statements specifically indicate that there has been a failure of the symbols of Christendom to contain the experience of Western humanity which has thrust it upon itself, causing it to struggle with the weight of responsibility for itself and all people without adequate means of expressing the significance of this responsibility. It has also found itself unable to enlist any power of the universe beyond itself and its rational possibilities in its struggle. It is not that Western humanity has lost the capacity or need to symbolize, but that it has no available content (either in cognitive form or affective experience) it can believe in enough to express itself in terms of it. There is nothing it can believe in strongly enough to make commitment possible. It must speak in terms of its freedom and responsibility.

The loss of meaningful symbols confronts every aspect of culture. The rational process has distanced the unapproachable sacred based on Judeo-Christian tradition and has allowed basic values to be questioned. This

process can be seen as it operates in the life of a person as he/she matures. The child's coloring book is filled with symbols which express the big feelings of his/her life. Through the educational and conditioning processes of our culture those symbols disappear and in their place appear the reasoned, purposive symbols of a logical positivist. The meaning of the symbol was there, but when other means of expressing it appeared, the symbol was replaced or entirely dismissed. This process in society removes the gods from their hill.

Weber has observed that the rationalization of Western culture and society has been equivalent to a process of desacralization.⁴ The result is tenuous ethical values about the conduct of life which further complicates the task of working out symbols through which to relate to the world and through which to know one's own identity. With the loss of meaning for transcendent symbols, the individual's personal symbols also seem to lose power.

Christianity's Influence

The rise of rational questioning about the order of life obviously came from many directions, but Christianity encouraged it and itself initiated the demise of transcend-

⁴Thomas J. J. Altizer, "The Religious Meaning of Myth and Symbol," in his *Truth, Myth and Symbol* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 92.

ent symbolization in two ways. First, growing out of the Jewish abhorrence of idolatry, there was an attempt to avoid any form, altar or image, which might incorporate a tendency toward idolatry. In fact, the first generations of Christians were called "atheists" or godless people, one of the reasons being the absence of churches and outwardly visible symbols.⁵ More will be said about this characteristic's contribution to iconoclastic controversies and the protestant reformation. Secondly, the new faith embodied in Christianity would not permit the sacred to be identified with the secular. In this sense as Christianity desacralized the world it pushed the realm of the sacred back from the world and allowed humanity to investigate it without fear of violating the territory of the gods.⁶ Humanity began to hypothesize and as the scientific method came into being, it began to settle some of its uncertainties. As humanity questioned, it objectified and came to realize that value was not in the ritual or the symbol. As the symbol became objectified it lost its life-value because all had access to the truth the symbol had veiled.

⁵Edward Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 100.

⁶Michael J. Taylor, *The Sacred and the Secular* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 1.

Protestantism's Influence

Further depreciation of symbols has been brought about by Protestantism which has been characterized as a revolt against symbols. It was noted by Jung to have historically experienced loss and weakening of symbols.

He wrote:

The history of the development of Protestantism is one of chronic iconoclasm. One wall after another fell. And the work of destruction was not too difficult, either, when once the authority of the church had been shattered. We all know how, in large things as in small, in general as well as in particular, piece after piece collapsed, and how the alarming impoverishment of symbolism that is now the condition of life came about. The power of the church has gone with that loss of symbolism, too. . . .⁷

Tillich, commenting on the virtual disappearance of symbolic thinking and feeling in Protestantism refers to Jung's comments:

C. G. Jung has called the history of Protestantism a history of continuous 'iconoclasm' ('the destruction of pictures' that is, of religious symbols) and, consequently, the separation of our consciousness from the universally human 'archetypes' that are present in the subconscious of everybody. He is right. Protestants often confuse essential symbols with accidental signs. They often are unaware of the numinous power inherent in genuine symbols, words, acts, persons, things. They have replaced the great wealth of symbols appearing in the Christian tradition by rational concepts, moral laws and subjective emotions.⁸

⁷Carl G. Jung, *The Integration of Personality* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1939), p. 6.

⁸Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. xix.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable losses in Protestantism has been the symbol of Mary. Objection to her role in Catholicism has resulted in a lack of attention to her place in Protestant Christianity. The cost is the loss of the female element in the life of the religion. Its loss and the resulting masculine tone of Protestantism sharply curtails the Protestant understanding of compassion and grace to name only two. The loss of the mystical element commonly associated with the female has strengthened the rational tone already present in Christianity.

Humanism's Influence

Supplementing this tendency away from symbolization inherent in Christianity and encouraged by Protestantism is a more recent tendency to confuse symbol with reality. Seeds of this move come from the nascent humanism of the Renaissance in its doctrine of humanity which came to understand people in terms of this world. Bridge wrote:

[It] . . . introduced a process into European art which necessarily led to the eventual death of the symbols which it had adopted or created, for humanism by its nature rivets the attention to man and his environment. . . . So the symbols used became more and more easily mistakable for the reality, until they began to be regarded as ends in themselves which were in no need of an underlying significance. Indeed, the artist's purpose became precisely that of presenting the symbols as realities. . . . The arts merely reflected what was going on throughout the developing ethos of Christendom. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the seeds of the idea that man was valuable in himself, apart from his relationship to God, began to sprout. . . . The logical conclusion of the process

thus introduced was reached in Harnack's liberal humanism, on the one hand, which equated the material symbols with reality, thus obscuring the truth to which they should have pointed, killing the symbols as symbols and idolatrously enthroning them as realities in themselves.⁹

The humanist ideal of equating symbols with realities captures and conditions the mind as one grows up until eventually one is unable to find the value or purpose of symbols. Their existence is passed. Perhaps this is where the Nietzschean proposition of the death of God may apply to particular symbolizations of the ultimate, much like Jung's comment that the gods die from time to time due to humanity's discovery that they do not mean anything.¹⁰ When the reality becomes identified with the symbol both are lost. According to Whitehead's understanding:

The human mind is functioning symbolically when some components elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions and usages respecting other components of its experience. The former set of components are the 'symbols' and the latter set constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols.¹¹

Borrowed Symbols

A final observation about Christian symbolism today is that those symbols which are used in the church arise

⁹Anthony Bridge, "The Life and Death of Symbols," in F. W. Dillistone (ed.) *Myth and Symbol* (London: S.P.C.K., 1966), pp. 70f.

¹⁰Jung, op. cit., p. 60.

¹¹Alfred N. Whitehead, *Symbolism* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 7f.

not so much out of the people's experience of them, but give the appearance of being borrowed from someone else's catalogue of symbols. This is the experience of the spirit speaking to one generation, providing it with freedom through revelation. But, what was freedom for the first generation has become the restricting structure of the next because the experience of the symbol is not the same. The symbol has life only if it is experienced by each generation. When symbols are copied for the value in the object itself, their meaning has gone. There is a parallel in art. A "pastiche" is a copy by one man of another man's symbols for their own sake without understanding them or what they point to. This use of an object makes it a sign (conceived). In Christianity, this use of objects makes them tools of evangelism, unable to draw attention to reality since they are mistaken for the reality itself.

THE HUMAN NEED FOR SYMBOLS

In contrast to the eroding situation regarding the value of symbols in present usage, Cassirer's classical definition of man as "*animal symbolicum*" still maintains unquestionable support.¹² Humanity needs symbols because of their function in his life. They enable one to tran-

¹²Ernst Cassirer, *Essay on Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 25f.

scend the self of the immediate situation and allow expression of the self which rests in the depths of potential being. Langer has written that symbols are needed for mental anchorage. She wrote:

It takes a strong mind to keep its orientation without overt symbols, acts, assertions and social corroborations; to maintain it in the face of the confounding pattern of enacted heresy (violations of one's beliefs urged upon him by outside forces) is more than the average mentality can do.¹³

Psychoanalysis itself emerged in response to personal and social crises growing out of the disintegration of symbols and myths in an age of transition. Individuals no longer able to orient themselves using central cultural symbols reacted in forms which have come to be known as anxiety, despair, neurotic guilt and other pathological conditions. Without central symbols carrying transcendent meaning, the individual cannot cope with the normal crises of life such as chronic illness, death of loved ones and his/her own death and the accompanying anxiety and guilt. Psychoanalysis arose partially in response to the loss of symbols and the accompanying identity crises. The value of its contribution to this area of human life has caused many to look at it as the source of their own personal salvation.

Approaching from the field of psychoanalysis, May

¹³Susanne Langer, *Philosophy In A New Key* (New York: New American Library, 1951), pp. 244f.

has asserted that ". . . symbols and myths, far from being topics which can be discarded in psychology, are rather in the center of our psychoanalytic understanding of man." He added that "clinical data supports the thesis that man is uniquely the symbol-using organism. . . . Symbolizing is basic to such questions as personal identity."¹⁴ Symbols relate to identity because of what May has called their "progressive function." This action of symbols fosters a developing reveration of natural relationships and personal existence. They fuse inner reality with the reality of the outside world for they are "the expression in finite form of an awareness on the part of mankind of the underlying processes of life."¹⁵ As such they are roads to universals for what Jung has called the "collective unconscious" in the world of man at large. There has been nothing to indicate that the fragmentation of life or the variety of experiences of secular humanity in the contemporary world has destroyed the collective unconscious or its need for expression. Rather, as the pathos and tragedy of recurring life continue, the "psychic residua of numberless experiences of the same type" survive and grow apart from any conscious experience of one's own.

¹⁴May, op. cit., pp. 21f.

¹⁵John C. Cooper, *The New Mentality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 30.

Whitehead has supported the thesis that symbols are basic to humanity. He wrote: "However you may endeavor to expel it, it ever returns. Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration: It is inherent in the very texture of human life."¹⁶ Even though "hard-headed" persons want facts not symbols, it is necessary for them to go to symbols for complete self-expression. Humanity, according to Whitehead, experiences repulsion (the theoretical desire to pierce to ultimate fact) and attraction (the need for expression) with symbols and cannot function without them.

Dillistone has said that today, more than ever, persons need symbols to stand between the paradoxes of life, symbols to stand between the alienation felt within oneself and between oneself and others:

The cry for new symbols is by no means uncommon at the present time. Not a few have awoken to the realization that many of the traditional symbols have lost their power. Yet with this there has come an equally firm conviction that man cannot live without symbols. Whatever else may distinguish him from the beasts here is one clear mark of difference. He creates symbols, he responds to symbols, he communicates through symbols. And what is true of his general cultural life is certainly true of his religious life. Wherever religion flourishes there it will be found that symbols--verbal, visual, or dramatic--are in constant use. . . . It can, I think, be confidently affirmed

¹⁶Whitehead, op. cit., pp. 61f.

that no stable religious life is possible apart from appropriate and appealing symbols.¹⁷

THE SITUATION OF SYMBOLS IN THE CHURCH

After noting the erosion of contemporary symbols, but affirming the need of symbols, it becomes necessary to examine the use of symbols in the church. The Christian Church, as one of the elements of Western society, finds itself threatened by the loss of powerful expression and the possibility of death to its present form. The lack of power to influence society and the level of threat to its present physical existence indicate its weakened position.

The charge that the church functions chiefly as a preserver of ancient Christian rites and symbols, an archive or museum, must be considered an indictment. The urgency of answering the charge is even greater when some leave the institutional church because of dedication to the Event of Jesus--the origin of meaning and purpose for all rites and symbols of the church. Few, if any, who have left the church out of a sense of moral outrage over the hypocrisy and reactionary attitude of clergy and laity, have done so out of a revulsion against Jesus. As the meaning of the church's symbol, "Christ," is seen in Jesus,

¹⁷F. W. Dillistone, "The Function of Symbols in Religious Experience," in his *Myth and Symbol*, pp. lf.

that meaning impinges upon the life of one who looks and is present in the life of that person as he/she responds, whether in the church or not.

Classical Christian theology has always been a "Christ" theology and Christ is the symbol based on the image of the man Jesus in the New Testament. That symbol continues to capture humanity regardless of religious attitude. Classical Christianity has lived through other symbols, Creation, Fall, reconciliation, salvation, Kingdom of God, Trinity, and symbolic acts, baptism and communion. They have carried power and meaning for hundreds of years. After mentioning how the church has abused the symbols it possessed, the question of their future will be discussed.

Victims of Abuse

Much of the Church's weakness and loss arises from the misuse of the symbols which have come to it. A clearer understanding of the nature of symbol is needed if recovery is sought. As many suggestions as there are scholars would offer help to understand symbols more fully, but none is as inclusive or as concise as the proposals of Tillich. He has suggested that symbols "point beyond themselves," "participate in that to which they point" and not only "open up levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us" but also "unlock dimensions and elements of our soul

which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality."¹⁸

Illustration of the failure to recognize the significance of a symbol is seen in the misuse made of one. The word symbol "sin" has come to bear superstitious and fantastic connotations like many other symbols used by the church. It brings to mind a number of acts which have come to be identified as the symbol. These acts have come to represent the symbol as if it were a reality in itself and not a symbol also. For many churchmen "sin" is a word symbol for drinking, dancing or other activities which have come to be the object of the church's attention. The symbol of sin is not understood as a symbol opening a new level of reality related to the human condition. It is not understood as a meaningful expression of human experience. The word symbol "sin" no longer is used to express the reality for which it appears, the estrangement of man, estrangement from every aspect of relationship.

A close analysis of Tillich would eliminate much erroneous thought in the discussion of symbols. The symbol is not something which can be dismissed once its truth has been seen because it participates in that truth and

¹⁸Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 41-43.

functions as an agent of salvation.¹⁹ Serving as a means to discover new levels of meaning within one's self and also the external environment, symbols do function in terms of salvation, because they open areas of reality which otherwise would not be known or shared. It is, however, the form of sharing that becomes didactic which further distorts the symbol.

Often it is imagined that symbols of the church provide windows of understanding through which meaning is added to life as the symbol is explained. As soon as a symbol is explained in other terms, however, it ceases to be a true symbol. Richardson wrote:

It is a mere sign or token, artificial and lifeless and its explanation, not itself is the point of contact we have with reality; for a true symbol cannot be 'explained' in the sense that the explanation is more important than the symbol and makes it unnecessary.²⁰

A symbol is the subject of experience. Its sharing is in common experience, not explanations.

Life Cycle of a Symbol

Attempts to communicate symbols or to explain their meaning raise a final point of consideration, the life cycle of a symbol. Tillich's essay on "The Religious

¹⁹Gustave H. Todrank, *The Secular Search For a New Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 83.

²⁰Cyril Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism," in Johnson, op. cit., p. 3.

"Symbol" has a section headed 'The Rise and Decline of Religious Symbols.'²¹ Others too, have written about the life and death of symbols as man surpasses or abandons those sensitivities or feelings which created them.

A symbol involves a sequence of events which can be identified as a life cycle. It unfolds in three parts. The symbol is seen, expressed, then objectified.²² The beginning, birth, is in its discovery, in the moment it is perceived. It cannot be invented; it cannot be produced intentionally.²³ Neither does it emerge merely on conscious, rational levels. A symbol is recognized when the whole being is engaged and struggling on all levels of affect and willing with something which seeks to relate itself to the life of that person. It is then that the symbol is born out of that experience.

The next phase of life is brought about as the symbol is communicated, for in being expressed it is given the form of the language of communication and restricted to that degree. The restriction also results in a certain amount of objectification. When it becomes objectified, it

²¹Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," in May, op. cit., p. 94.

²²Hopper, op. cit., p. 237.

²³D. Mackenzie Brown (comp.) *Ultimate Concern: Tillich In Dialogue* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 149.

has lost the property of being a symbol, because then its objectivized state is substituted for the living and infinite properties of the event. The power of a symbol is in its drawing someone into it and that is destroyed when it becomes restricted by the form in which it is captured and kept. To whatever degree a symbol has been converted from a means of communication to a false center of objectivization, its life has become extinct.

In light of this it must be asked if the symbols of Christianity are alive. With the loss of meaning of symbols in Western culture and the impotence of the Christian Church to bring meaningful experience out of this chaos through the use of its symbols, the future course of the church can be launched from at least three attitudes: (1) All is well, Christian symbols address humanity today with the meanings needed to affirm its identity in the universe; (2) Traditional symbols are not working too well and need to be reinterpreted; (3) Christian symbols are dead. New symbols are needed if Christianity is to speak of life today. These attitudes are examined in the next paragraphs.

SUMMARY

Symbols in Western culture are in a state of crisis. Western humanity also lives in a state of crisis, not having adequate symbols to reveal and express its

whole being. It suffers an identity crisis. The human condition of estrangement continues. There is a search for new ways to discover one's hidden identity. There is a search for new ways to express the depths of being which are felt by people.

Symbols and rites are not disappearing, but new ones are emerging or conscious attempts are being made to develop them by many secular bodies. Secular Salvations are adopting and reinterpreting Christian symbols to meet their needs just as Christianity adopted pagan rituals and symbols as vehicles for its own self-expression.

The church, in seeking religious commitment is faced with a crisis of symbols because religious commitment is essentially symbolic activity. In the midst of this crisis it seems unlikely that an appeal for religious commitment can be successful. It is not likely for one to commit oneself totally to something which does not expand one's self-understanding or capacity for self-expression. This will happen only when the symbols convey a meaning about the human situation.

Which of the three attitudes listed above offer the most potential? It would be unrealistic to suggest the first since all the data indicates that is not the case. It would be humanly impossible to adopt the third, because the impossibility of creating symbols intentionally has already been discussed. New symbols may emerge in the

present struggle and the church must be open to them if their reality involves concepts of Christianity.

There can be participation however, in the third option at the point of avoiding symbols which are restricted to antique world views. Symbols which do not address the current human situation should be avoided by the church. An example of particular interest is the use of water in the rite of baptism as a symbol of regeneration and an expression of religious commitment. Some distinctively Christian symbols, closely associated as they are with the environment out of which they originally emerged may not survive in the altogether changed environment of the twentieth century. This use of water may be one of them. Water, the mysterious source of life, no longer appears and departs in its own curious manner. It is stored in pipes and tanks and drawn when needed for particular purposes. Technology has moved humanity far from the agricultural scenes in which this symbolism was born. While Jung's studies show that water is the commonest archetypal image of the unconscious,²⁴ giving support to the assumption that a descent into the water symbolically describes a new penetration into those deeper levels from which life grows, it appears that the act does not contain enough power to satisfy modern humanity.

²⁴Jung, op. cit., pp. 66-68.

A further manner in which there can be participation in the third option begins to relate more specifically to the preceding option--reinterpretation. More precisely, an informed church should avoid using conventional meanings which are not Biblical. An earlier discussion on the word-symbol "sin" cites an instance of this error. Conventional meanings are often unscriptural and unchristian when examined closely.

Avoiding dead symbols often involves reinterpreting symbols because the point at which all life is gone is difficult to determine. There are some who believe it is impossible to reinterpret Christian symbols so that they will become powerful again. The undertaking involves the risk that there are still unexhausted powers in the Christian reality, which will arise when it is examined more fully in relation to its own heritage and by more intimate relations with non-Christian religions.

The potential of the symbols the Church has was lost by incorrect use of the symbols, inadequate projection of them and the lack of innovation. What Whitehead said of society can also be said of religion. He wrote:

The future of a society which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision must ultimately decay either from anarchy or from the slow atrophy of life stifled by useless shadows.²⁵

25Whitehead, op. cit., p. 88.

Christian symbols will regain their significance for the Church when they again become symbolic, pointing to reality, not being mistaken as reality itself. Religious symbols represent the transcendent, but are not the transcendent. "They do not make God part of the empirical world."²⁶ The Eschaton has not yet arrived and the symbol as earthly reality cannot be discussed. The Heavenly City is not yet the Secular City. There must be a renewal of the symbolic and analogic if life is to be expressed beyond the narrow dogmatic assumptions of humanist materialism. The finitude of humanity, its potential and its divinity fail to express all of reality. Christianity, through its misuse of symbolism and its accommodation of mere humanism in locating its symbols in earthly reality prevents one from transcending the present by requiring an impossible leap from a God who was here, but has gone.

The official model of religious commitment has received a challenge from the pluralistic order which surrounds it. No longer are all socialized into the official model. In actuality there is a small minority being socialized into it with more accepting it with "tongue in cheek." In many situations church religiosity

²⁶Tillich in May, op. cit., p. 77.

is a survival of a traditional social form of religion and lies on the periphery of modern industrial economies.²⁷

Due to its lack of significance, the official model is on the verge of succumbing to a variety of religious themes arising out of the private sphere.²⁸

If this happens, the church as a religious institution would have a special place among other religious manifestations because of its historical connections to the traditional Christian official model but would be a secondary institution in relation to the private sphere. This would create subjectively constructed and eclectic systems of ultimate significance. These would vary considerably in content and structure and be less stable than if there were an official model.

In seeking religious commitment the Church seeks participation in symbolic activity. For individuals to enter into this kind of involvement, that symbolic action must carry significant meaning. This comes from recognizing the powerful statements involved in the symbols. Where the symbols are weak and broken as in Western culture today, they must be reinterpreted in terms of a modern experience of life. Several possibilities present them-

²⁷Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 101.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 103f.

selves, but it is suggested here that small groups within the church will provide the best opportunity to confront the human situation on more than merely conscious, rational levels. The small group can provide the opportunity for the individual to engage his/her life situation and struggle with it on all levels of affect and willing. It is this kind of encounter with one's situation that opens the door to interpreting universal themes of life in terms of Christian concepts. It is at that point that ritual as the verbalization of the inner meaning of the symbol will provide adequate expression for the depths of one's identity. When this is discovered the symbols and symbolic acts of ritual will help the person to rise above time into communion with a world of hidden, changeless, timeless essences. It is then possible to see religious commitment as a cosmic expression of what has happened for that person in that Community of Faith. The next chapter will deal with how the small group makes this possible.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPING AN EXPRESSIVE FORM OF COMMITMENT:

THE USE OF SMALL GROUPS

Previous chapters have referred to the ill health of symbols and symbolic acts in twentieth century Western culture. The Church exhibits its own symptoms of the malady. In its efforts to engage persons through symbolic action, its diminished potency is obvious to any eye. The intransigent Official Model of religious commitment continues to occupy a meaningless place in the religious life of many people.

As part of this study, the writer surveyed more than four hundred persons who had joined one of five urban churches in Los Angeles over the past three years. The results of that study are used in this chapter. Though their membership preparation varied in number of meetings and foremat, 67 percent responded that they did not know persons joining their church at the same time any better than others of the congregation. In addition to that discouraging discovery, 61 percent reported that the process by which they became members was a formality serving primarily as a process by which to become a member rather than a meaningful experience having positive results in their lives.

In addition to what is for many an unsatisfactory process for becoming a member, the general form of church-life is negative. Our conventional structure is not such as to enable people to come into deep personal relationship. Raines has noted that:

Social clubs and groups in the church are at best only a vestibule to the family and may be false substitutes for real belonging together in Christ. The committee structure does not necessitate or even encourage the personal sharing of life which is the heart of the family (of Christ).¹

Modern church life often involves the person in groups of people who, especially in churches outside rural areas, are drawn together by the personality or the oratorical skill of the minister. Personal association except on an occasional basis is usually possible only for a small minority who are active in leadership. This minority is often less than 10 percent of the total membership.²

More and more there is a great deal of non-participation on the part of the majority of members who usually tend to assume a possible listening role. Even in worship, choirs more often make the response for the congregation and sing some of the prayers. This encourages and creates derived rather than a functional religion in

¹Robert A. Raines, *Reshaping the Christian Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 23f.

²Paul D. Maves, *The Church and Mental Health* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 84.

which inherited forms pass for personal experience.

Religious life increasingly becomes a formal procedure.

Beyond the problems of decreased participation, in many churches members have no sense of belonging to a significant group which counts for something in their lives. As a person attends a worship service and hears the minister speak pontifically of "our church family," but does not even know the persons around him, he may feel the impersonalism of the large church denies the words proclaimed by the preacher. "The contradiction intensifies his feeling of being less than a person in that situation."³ This signals the presence of $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\alpha$ but not $\kappa\omega\tau\omega\omega\alpha$.

Another criticism of modern church life often made is that existing groups are task centered rather than person centered. This is often a more gentle way of expressing the fact that the members are exploited for the benefit of the institution and those who are identified with it.

It is ironic for church life to be in such a condition. When the concerns of the church deal with human interrelatedness, the human relationship to divinity and the necessary role these relationships play in one's well

³Clyde Reid, "Pastoral Care Through Small Groups," *Pastoral Psychology*, XVIII:172 (March 1967), 14-22.

being, it is difficult to believe so little attention is given to these elements of life. It is not blindness, because it is possible for one churchman to say:

The crucial element of mental health and religious experience revolves around a degree of openness and communion which a person has with his fellow men. Whether we prosper or perish is somewhat determined by how well we deal with the problem of fellowship.⁴

It is a matter of the Church recognizing that persons are social beings who cannot violate human inter-relatedness. Without quality relationships, togetherness is not satisfying. It is a matter of recognition and action for as Casteel has written:

. . . The creation of more significant and more effective interpersonal relationships in primary groups would appear to claim high priority for those persons and institutions concerned for the recovery of the human person in our day.⁵

A new form of commitment, an expressive form, is needed to provide the means with which to grasp the situation and aid in the creation of significant interpersonal relationships which will nurture, challenge and release personal potential and lift humanity beyond its ordinary commitments to positing an ultimate commitment. This

⁴Otis A. Maxfield and Donald E. Smith, "Therapeutic Dimensions In Church Groups," *Pastoral Psychology*, XV:145 (June 1964), 45-52.

⁵John L. Casteel, "The Rise of Interpersonal Groups," in his *The Creative Role of Interpersonal Groups In The Church Today* (New York: Association Press, 1968), p. 23.

chapter attempts to focus upon this new form of commitment and how small groups in the church can help persons attain it for themselves.

NEEDED: AN EXPRESSIVE FORM OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

The inert form by which a person comes into the church is repulsive to modern humanity and is even of little value to the average member as indicated by the data introduced in the first part of this chapter. Much of the reason it is necessary to develope an expressive form of commitment today is because there is a gap between the official model of religious commitment and the internal systems by which modern humanity operates. It is as if the Church is using one edition of a "Cosmological Lexicon" and the edition in the member's hands is revised to the point of being difficult to compare with the earlier edition.

In addition to and in some cases instead of needs which complement the traditional functions of religion, modern humanity has needs to which traditional functions do not speak. Remembering the discussion of earlier chapters, the efforts of the ancient mind to preserve life and to hold the forces around it in balanced tension by offering supplication to the gods again comes to mind. These tasks are not so mysteriously urgent for the modern mind. Religious acts are no longer called upon to magically enable the actor to receive the favor of the gods' bless-

ing. Sacrifice, self-denial and ascetic living no longer have the value of assuaging the gods' wrath and assuring their support. Indeed, accompanying the Hebrew prophets' voice and the emergence of the axial era, there was a general realization that the religious act was not sufficient. In responding to the survey conducted for this writing, 74 percent of the respondents indicated that a verbal commitment (vow) is not necessary before an action can be really Christian. Yet the organized church often does not reflect this candid attitude in its own interpretation of the Christian act. Ritual in the church, especially branches with a great liturgical tradition, still is seen to have the magic effect of creating a new life situation.

In contrast to the ancient mind, a modern religious identity views existence as a calculated risk, not depending upon the mystical unknown. Life today does not depend upon the satisfaction of the gods by the specific acts of pre-axial man. Instead of a dependent existence, there are personal internal systems causing individuals to pursue courses of action which offer the most value for them. Movement is in a direction free of metaphysical dependence, seeking to enhance existence and achieve a fuller life by choosing the values which reflect upon that which is sought. Let the point be that modern humanity no longer depends upon metaphysical tutelage to give life security

and guidance. The Church can no longer force people into a weak dependency upon its rites and dogma.

The Burden of Choice

Only in some cases, however, is the course a person chooses a response to the "call forward" or the "tendency toward fuller being" identified earlier. This is true for two reasons. The first is that independence from metaphysical tutelage means only that humanity recognizes to a large degree that it is not at the mercy of supernatural forces. It does not mean that humanity is free of dependent characteristics.

The basic insecurity which inhabits being continues to be a part of humanity. Normally there is still a certain level of anxiety which results from self-awareness. Earlier comments suggested that inability to depend upon magical formulae and control by supernatural forces increased the experience of helplessness and limitation. Being less able to depend upon external control, humanity was given the responsibility for choices and decisions.

Increased autonomy aggravates the basic insecurity which is a necessary ingredient of personal identity. This threat of extra responsibility, perhaps too much responsibility, affects humanity the same way a parent's permissiveness does his child. It is necessary for the child to grow, but too much freedom overloads the child's resources

and his/her operating functions break down. Greater awareness of freedom and responsibility causes the view-meter showing one's sense of ability and competence to register a drop as does the child's when he/she is forced to move beyond the usual level of self-control.

Resulting behavior, in the case of the child, may be erratic, dangerous and pitifully ineffective as he/she seeks to satisfy basic needs and to establish self-control. As parents know, the conclusion of the episode often is brought only when control is reestablished by an external force which whether brought by the parent or a fact of life is as often damaging as it is therapeutic for the child. Like the child, when overly threatened, humanity seeks a source of satisfaction and control however, finitude requires that one sometimes chooses the wrong source of satsifaction.

The second reason that only in some cases is the course chosen by a person a response to the "call forward" lies in the very direction of the course one takes when attempting to be responsible. Involved in the positive response is the possibility of greater insecurity due to the greater level of honesty with self and others which is required. Traditional religious forms encouraged dependent and irresponsible behavior. New forms of religious expression of commitment are necessary if modern humanity is to be assisted in assuming the responsibility

which it must bear. It is possible for religion to do this. One woman respondent to the survey made in this study indicated that through small group involvement in her church she was assisted in becoming responsible. She said:

Religion took on a new meaning for me. I feel like my mind was filled with a bunch of trash and I have discarded this garbage and am replacing it with some real values, beliefs and standards of my own. (Now) religion (for me) is accepting responsibility. Religion helps a person to be strong enough to be honest and lonely rather than revert to getting into bad situations and relationships rather than be lonely.⁶ Religion became life rather than a once a week thing.

The tendency for humanity is to move in the direction which most directly satisfies its immediate needs. Religion is called upon to make a positive contribution in this area because it is not the case that one always chooses the course which leads to growth and actualization of his potential. It is recognized that:

The human potentials movement needs the emphasis of the Hebrew-Christian tradition (and of Freud) on man's powerful tendencies to resist, block, and distort the growth drive. Simplistic growth models such as unfolding flowers are deceptively attractive but inadequate when applied to the complexities of human life.⁷

Dealing with this aspect of humanity from ancient Christian wisdom gives depth to the forward movement captured by the Third Force school.

⁶Unpublished response to the survey made for this study.

⁷Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *The People Dynamic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 130.

It is necessary to deal with the subject from the viewpoint of theological insights. Failing to do this is:

. . . naive optimism concerning the nature of man and the power of reason alone to alter human relationships. (The demands of this task) are impossible without the empowering grace of the Holy Spirit. An example of this is the moralistic admonition that leaders and group members are to be 'permissive' and 'accepting' as if this were a simple human possibility, a matter of volition alone.⁸

The situation of modern humanity necessitates the development of an expressive form of religious commitment to deal with some of its deepest aspects. The common ground between the sacred and secular, the problem of humanizing common life, does not remove the need for the churchman to see the deeper level of concern raised by theological insights. This behooves the church to develop the means for this expression of humanity because as Clinebell wrote:

For the normal anxiety and existential loneliness which are inescapable parts of man's self-awareness, only spiritual and philosophical answers satisfy.⁹

Or as Wedel has put it:

Human relations science tells us much of the gift of group acceptance and the loneliness of group rejection. But it does not presume to deal with the loneliness of guilt, of the agony of a sin-laden conscience, or the grace of divine forgiveness, or of a brotherly love which embraces enemy as well as friend.¹⁰

⁸Theodore O. Wedel, "Interpersonal Groups and the Church," in Casteel, *The Creative Role*, p. 50.

⁹Clinebell, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁰Wedel, op. cit., p. 51.

For some time it had been decided by Christianity that the secular was evil and held only negative value. Now there is seen to be positive value in it for modern humanity. There must be, however, a recognition of its incompleteness without the transcendent. The voice of the organized church must make its contribution toward understanding the whole person heard.

Expressive and Coping Behavior

Finally, to sharpen another aspect of the need for an expressive form of religious commitment, types of behavior must be examined. Maslow made a helpful distinction between two types of behavior which seems to parallel the difference between the traditional and emerging ideas of commitment. He divided behavior into two categories: expressive and coping.¹¹ The latter is adaptive, functional and purposive or useful behavior. The former is "non-instrumental" or non-functional. Expressive behavior is unmotivated (in the sense of meeting specific needs), unlearned and tends to serve as an end in itself. This behavior is often effortless and seeks to define the state of the organism. The object of this distinction is to state that not all behavior is "means" behavior. It is not

¹¹ Abraham Maslow, "The Expressive Component of Behavior," in his *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), pp. 179-199.

always primarily to get something done. Examples Maslow cites are singing, sauntering and painting. This behavior occurs where a person is engaged in actualizing his/her potential.

It appears that a traditional understanding of commitment is similar to coping behavior instead of the expressive component. There needs to be room for an expressive form of commitment in the church which allows persons to celebrate an involvement in something they choose to do not because it is useful behavior (in the sense that it satisfies dependency needs) but because it is an expression of the state of the organism as Maslow has defined Expressive behavior.

The Church must address itself to the reality that not all people need to participate because of coping behavior, but that some people want an outlet through which they can express positive regard for one another and for life. A young couples' group which the writer leads is an example of this.

Several months ago the couples in this group contracted to meet six times as a marriage growth group. At the end of that time the group wanted to continue meeting and include other couples as it seemed appropriate. Because of complex schedules of several participants and especially one student who worked nights and some weekends, the group's schedule was also irregular. Yet with almost

no exceptions when the group decided to meet they would find a time when everyone could be there. This has varied from week nights to weekend afternoons and even Saturday nights. Once the writer expressed his surprise that group members would be so flexible and meet often at times inconvenient for some. The response was that tasks, errands and "social" life were not as important as the depth of relationships experienced in the group. This is an expressive form of commitment on both levels which have been discussed in this section and it is possible to develope the same type of expressive form for religious commitment.

THE OFFICIAL MODEL AND=RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

The Official Model of religious commitment only begins with reception into the membership of the church. The stunning statistics showing that that process was more a formality than a meaningful event was shown in the introduction to this chapter. The Official Model continues to measure religious commitment, however, in terms of frequency of participation and financial contribution. Respondents to the survey conducted for this writing are apparently religiously committed. Some 67 percent indicated they attend functions at their church at least once a week and 56 percent of those actually reported attending more than once a week. Of those responding 30 percent were

involved in small groups within the church and 51 percent of that group reported being in two or more groups.

Financial contribution to the church probably reflected low income more than level of commitment because 46 percent indicated they contribute from 0-100 dollars annually to their church (50 percent of the respondents were aged 60 years or more).

Other responses indicated that in spite of the high level of involvement of those in small groups, 42 percent replied that their small group involvement is pleasant, but really does not affect the way they live. In addition, 30 percent responded that their other involvements in the church did. This response indicates a poor use of small groups in the church, but points to a larger issue which is shown more clearly by the response to another question.

In response to a question asking what part of the church allowed them best expression of their Christian commitment, 50 percent responded that it was the worship service and another 26 percent replied that it was a personal responsibility that the person had taken. Here was support for the hypothesis that the church member primarily experienced himself in a passive-dependent role, listening to an authority figure expound on the Word of God. Secondly, the next level of response showed the member doing something for the institution. Labeling that as exploitation might indicate a value judgment on the part of

the writer, but it does tend toward works righteousness if nothing else.

An Interpretation From Transactional Analysis

To the writer the data listed above indicates a situation which Transactional Analysis describes as Parent-Child interaction. In this case the member would function at the Child's ego level, while the institution and the clergy assumed the role of the Parent. The child depends upon and seeks to please the source of security and sense of well being. Already this begins to explain why some members resist change within the church so strongly.

Change might interfere with satisfying, complementary transactions and the Child might have some unmet needs which would threaten its security. In this situation, commitment becomes loyalty and loyalty immunity to everything which cannot meet the needs of the structured relationship.¹²

In Transactional Analysis terms, the Child is happy as long as its needs are met and it is protected from uncertainty and insecurity. The Parent too, likes its role as long as the Child is good, performing properly and preferably quiet. The Parent's needs are met in part by

¹²Harry Dewire, *Communication As Commitment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 104.

the dependency needs of the Child. The act of feeding conjures up images of the pleasure involved in having the power to dispense morsels which will sustain the life of the Child and yet not encourage it to grow up and leave home because its dependency is outgrown.

When either party of a transaction acts from another state, a crossed transaction occurs which means conflict. Transactions must be complementary to be need satisfying to both players of the game. If change is desirable for one player, he must be ready to confront the conflict that change will generate in his transactions with others. It appears that in the current situation neither is able to cope with the conflict generated in attempted change so a policy of avoidance is instigated. The Child may run away if displeased and the Parent would then have unsatisfied needs (if the Parent were truly dependent upon the Parent role, it might be destroyed and perhaps even die) and an empty house. So, the Parent wants the Child to stay home and keep the family happy, but that inevitable growth causes a problem. What can the Parent do when (if) the Child becomes an Adult? The Parent can deny growth only so long before the Child breaks loose from its grasp. Theoretically, it is impossible for a Parent to restrict a Child forever, but the created dependence of the Child in its early years can be seen in the later years of that person in his/her rigidity and dogmatism as he/she still

depends upon some outside authority to secure life.

On the other hand, if the Parent has interests and responsibilities other than nurturing its Child, how does it encourage growth? The empty nest brings nights of loneliness too. The Parent must overcome its dependency upon a helpless infant as the source of its satisfaction and fulfillment.

Changing the level of transactions creates conflict. Participants tend to avoid conflict in the interest of safety. In fact, Maslow has indicated in his discussion of the hierarchy of needs that religion tends to become fixated at the level of providing safety needs.¹³ This creates a relationship where participants are involved in a dependent type of feeding to preserve the status quo. Threatening times such as the present tend to accentuate the neurotic tendencies already present in people, causing a preoccupation with personal needs.

It is significant that 41 percent of the respondents identified the most important offering of the church as "spiritual guidance" while only 20 percent saw deep and meaningful relationships as most important. Only 6 percent felt "help in making decisions about issues of our time" was most important. The largest response, it will be

¹³Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, L (July 1943), 379f.

noted, indicated a preoccupation with one's self. The only other large cluster of responses (20 percent) indicated the most important offering of the church was "knowledge of God," again not related to this world or its people, but a very personal, introspective preoccupation.

In a world full of unknown, psychological dangers that is perceived to be hostile and overwhelming, the person tends to move in search for a protector or stronger person on whom he/she may depend. This is the earmark of the Official Model of religious commitment. Maslow has identified dependent religious activities as an indication of:

. . . The neurosis in which the search for safety takes its clearest form. They hedge themselves about with all sorts of ceremonials, rules and formulas so that every possible contingency may be provided for and so that no new contingencies may appear.¹⁴

The pattern of interaction just described is in contrast to the Adult to Adult transaction. This latter pattern is achieved periodically when two people recognize each other as equals. Their relationship is then characterized by respect for the integrity of each and a sense of trust that each acts responsibly toward the other. Each acts in freedom because the Adult can make decisions without consulting an authority figure as a Child would. Furthermore, the Adult allows others to decide for them-

¹⁴Ibid., p. 380.

selves and accepts that decision from them. There is no need to control the decision another makes because the autonomy of the other is perceived and accepted. Another part of being the Adult is possessing the capacity to deal successfully with the conditions of the outside world. This enables an objective appraisal of reality and makes it possible to organize life in such a way that needs are satisfied.

In moving into the Adult state the dependency of the Child is removed because authority is in the center of the Adult's own existence. The Adult is capable of making responsible decisions. Further, in moving into the Adult state, the controlling aspect of the Parent is removed because one does not need to control others to satisfy one's own needs. The Adult accepts the other's position and even encourages the other's growth and independence.

Certain changes are necessary before the Church and its members will be able to share in Adult interaction. When the layperson attempts to move out of the Child state or when the institution and its clergy attempt to leave the Parent role, there is again the conflict mentioned above. The conflict is within each and between both. Both experience pain when one attempts to change its level of interaction. Growth however, requires that that pattern change. There must be some means of dealing with the resulting pain and I submit the small group as a source of relief for both.

A Weak Fellowship

Many factors have conspired to place Western Christianity in its current situation. As many causes are within the Church as are outside it. It is obvious enough, in spite of the high level of loyalty of many members. One has written, "We believe in the communion of saints, but seldom experience it."¹⁵ For this person membership in the Church is only nominal because the Church exists in name and not in actuality for him/her. For years participation in the community of the gathered and religious commitment to it were synonymous, but:

. . . For us (as opposed to our forefathers) the problem consists in recreating within and alongside the church's institutional activities the Christian community which formerly could be taken for granted and which once was the soil in which Christian charity and Christian neighborliness could bring to men and women the gift of the 'glorious liberty of the Children of God' (Romans 8:21) and in which there appears the "forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2) and in which we make love our aim.¹⁶

The fact is that what existed naturally in many cases due to small town feeling and "old fashioned" neighborliness and concern cannot exist today without conscious assistance in the local congregation. Conformity

¹⁵Maves, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶James Ashbrook, "Theological Dimensions of Renewal Through Small Groups," *Pastoral Psychology*, XV:145 (June 1964), 26.

to the life of modern communities has tended to weaken and destroy the group life of the churches. When members' interests and time are occupied by civic and social clubs, veterans and business organizations, secret societies and high school and college fraternities, there must be something significant about the church's group life if it is going to involve people in a meaningful way.

Presently, large numbers of institutionally loyal church members are given their first introduction to a genuine interpersonal fellowship experience, on a level of conscious participation at least, outside the church in a secular group.¹⁷ Situations like this which reveal valuable experiences outside organized religion apparently were obvious to Christ when he said, "The sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light."¹⁸ Many in local congregations are acting out their own statement of value regarding sources of personal assistance. Anderson has summarized it well. He wrote:

Following the teachings of her master, Jesus Christ, the Church began as a fellowship in which persons were enabled to repent and change. Many people in local congregations are looking for transformation; but when they are desperate, they seek a psychologist or educator or someone outside the church. The church seems uninterested or unskilled or both, in helping people to

¹⁷Wedel, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁸Luke 16:8. Allowing for the possibility that this is a secondary addition, it would still serve as a wisdom saying.

change. The fact that there are so many church meetings that offer so few the conditions necessary for transformation should convince us of our need to repent and to change the way in which we have invested time spent together in small group meetings.¹⁹

In this section of this study an attempt has been made to show that the Official Model of religious commitment is in an unhealthy state, that religious commitment though perhaps intense is not satisfying and that many loyal members seek help for their lives in other places due to the inept and impotent forms within the church. The next section will attempt to identify ways in which small groups within the church may serve to enliven and recreate religious commitment.

SMALL GROUPS AND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

Small groups commonly have been used in preparing candidates for membership in the institutional church. They have been because most often the group joining is small and also because a group is a more efficient use of the leader's time. This does not mean the use of small groups in this area has been successful. Most comments regarding "membership training classes" carry the same feelings indicated by this group of members surveyed. It has not been a meaningful experience for most of them, but

¹⁹Philip A. Anderson, *Church Meetings That Matter* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1965), p. 89.

usually a formality and the participants have not gotten acquainted any better than they have with those already in membership (for the exact figures see the introduction to this chapter). This does not speak well for the Church's use of this time.

A New Type of Confirmation Class

To the writer's knowledge, small groups in the process of religious commitment have been exploited only on a small scale in perhaps experimental situations. The reports from them, however, are full of the same type of self-discovery and understanding that other types of growth groups evoke, but it is usually in relation to the implications of the decision just made regarding one's profession of faith or greater awareness as to the meaning involved in the act of joining the organized church.

In the above paragraph, "growth" was inserted ahead of "group" to describe a particular type of group the writer has in mind when he refers to this special methodology involved in membership preparation. Briefly, this type of group seeks to develop self-understanding and to encourage exploration into new kinds of relationships with other people. The leader uses his resources as a facilitator or enabler instead of an instructor. This approach is based on the conviction that dialogue and not monologue is more effective in developing the "student."

Confirmation classes, to be effective, must be more than didactic information giving. Educators have discovered that confluent education or experiential learning is more effective than cognitive activities have ever been. The church must become aware also that feeding young people with technical reason and with what the Church believes is inadequate education and does nothing to further the young person's experience of what the Church is about.

A ministry of meanings and relationship must be developed not only with youth but with all levels of persons in the church. If it is important with youth, it is crucial with adults. Candidates for membership should have help to examine the loyalties that they bring into the Church to see if these loyalties need to be surrendered or redeemed. A lecture on Christian belief may have its place, but it cannot be a substitute for the individual's own thinking and decision. Attempts to instruct and control result in a breakdown in communication in which the institution is unable to convey the meaning of the truth it seeks to convey to those to whom it ministers. To effectively communicate a ministry of meanings the Church must introduce dialogue into its educational process.²⁰

²⁰Ross Snyder, "A Ministry of Meanings and Relationship," *Pastoral Psychology*, XI:109 (December 1960), 24.

Erikson has identified the same idea. His term for commitment, fidelity, is his way of expressing the thought. He wrote that "fidelity . . . can arise only in the interplay of a life stage with the individuals and social forces of a true community."²¹

A "true community" as Erikson called it, is the intention of this type of approach. The purpose is to enable a climate of trust to develop so that openness can lead to honesty of expression. Honesty of expression depends upon the experience of acceptance from the other group members. This climate is essential because issues related to the process of making a religious commitment are personal and will not be shared without a sense of affirmation and support.

One experimental confirmation class tried to answer some basic questions like "Who am I?" "Who is my brother?" "Whom can I trust?" "What is love?" "Who is God?" and "What and where is the Church?" The instruction manual was used as a personal reference of the leader only with most of the class input being taken from activities along the lines of trust development, self-understanding and role playing. Shields, finger painting and physical activities such as rocking and breakout were used. None of the children

²¹Erik Erikson, *Identity* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 235.

dropped out and in the words of the leader, "I feel that we had the most meaningful group of any year for which I have been responsible."²²

If one's Christian experience and belonging to the church is to have any real significance for the individual, it must be shared with others in honest discussion. This necessity caused Leslie to write:

It is my observation that unless persons can have meaningful, feeling-level relationships, they cannot begin to appreciate Jesus or his teachings.²³

It is entirely possible for a youth in Confirmation Class to experience for the first time an honest relationship of meaning with the Church. That would be unfortunate, but possible. This point could make the difference in his feelings of value for the church thereafter.

The Value of Small Groups

Empirical studies support the value of the sharing type of group. Frank has studied the process of attitude change and religious conversion in depth and has stated that persons who experience religious conversion in isolation usually, if not invariably have previously had

²²Personal letter to Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. from Annette L. Aguilu, April 20, 1971.

²³Robert C. Leslie, "The Uniqueness of Small Groups In the Church," *Pastoral Psychology*, XV:145 (June 1964), 38.

an intense relationship with others who embraced the ideology that the convert claimed.²⁴ Intensive studies with American Prisoners of War who had undergone brain-washing convinced him that thought reform recognized what revivalism had discovered years ago, namely, that a person's immediate social milieu was of critical importance in sustaining or shaking one's self image and world view.²⁵ In contrast, Frank cited the classic experiment conducted in 1952 by Asch which demonstrated that a single person had great difficulty in maintaining perceptual judgment when opposed by a unanimous group and that the support of even one person greatly affected his ability to maintain his convictions.²⁶

Frank also noted that even the extreme pressures of thought reform seemed unable to produce long-lasting changes without continued group support. In terms of influence, this speaks clearly of the value in having a sharing group for a new member as he/she becomes part of the church and afterwards on another basis. If the parish to which a person comes can offer some support, he/she is no longer alone, but an accepted member of a new community.

²⁴ Jerome Frank, *Persuasion and Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 77.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

On the other hand, if the new found comrades in the Faith are not themselves bound together, one is very likely to drop away from the process one started. To paraphrase the scripture, he was hungry and was not taken in.

Beyond the immediate issue of application of new forms to the process of religious commitment, there seems to be a larger issue. This issue moves beyond the acts of commitment to the deeper level of one's actual Christian commitment, aside from its relation to the Official Model. This issue is more basic and is related to the official model of Christian commitment not because it is contained by it, but because, having seen beyond it, it becomes palatable to the new-comer.

A redemptive experience in Christian fellowship is the image which often appears in the New Testament discussion of the Body of Christ and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Descriptions of the koinonia and the caring acts permeating the early church bring alive the spirit of brotherhood which presently is preserved in some of the Church's structures and is the subject of much discussion there.

It is discussed because some have experienced it and it felt good. Others have known someone who had known it and marveled at the spirit with which they lived. There seems to be an intuitive knowledge that it is possible to experience the caring fellowship and its fragrance is

tantalizing. Fellowship, not isolation, seems to be easily seen as one of the "keys to the kingdom." The type of group in which this occurs need not be called by one of the common names of this time, but must display real warmth and genuine concern for each of its members. In the churches surveyed for this writing, there are very few groups led in the form of the growth group model. Yet, 57 percent of the respondents stated that their membership in a small group within the church had significantly affected their understanding of Christian commitment and 87 percent responded that their church involvement assisted them in experiencing and understanding the values they had chosen for their lives.

It becomes clear from statistics like these that lives of individuals have been deepened and strengthened. A comment made by one man speaks for many. He said, "When I came into this group, I had just about given up any hope of ever finding anything meaningful in religion."²⁷ He went on to say that within that previous two week period he had become conscious of a change and when he suddenly realized that religion had to do with relationships, his relationships began to change.

Personal testimonies like this man's point to the way persons can change in groups. The quality of the group

²⁷Ashbrook, op. cit., p. 31.

is the critical factor. Anderson listed several ways in which a person may change as a result of sensitive small group involvement. He cited six conditions which contribute to change:

1. If a group offers significant new belonging to a member, he may become a different person, a "new being."
2. If a group offers support and understanding to a member facing crisis, he can change.
3. If the persons in a group speak honestly about themselves, a person can change.
4. If a group provides for the healing of relationships, a person can change.
5. If a group provides a new interpretation of existence, a member can become a different person.
6. If a group provides for an experiencing of the Christian life, a member can become a different person.²⁸

Groups may vary considerably in approach, but where there is sensitive leadership and a climate of warmth and acceptance filled with a high level of trust, good things happen. A very simple system can have far reaching effects.

At the church in which the writer is a minister, a very elementary arrangement has been made. From the membership, forty-five to fifty persons were contacted to learn if they would become Care Group leaders. Response was surprising.

Forty members responded to the invitation. Each agreed to attend three training sessions to be held weekly

²⁸Anderson, op. cit., pp. 80-88.

after Sunday morning worship. These meetings (as have all subsequent meetings) began with lunch and continued until 2:30 p.m. In the first session the senior minister explained our intention and the proposed plan. There was also a short presentation of the role of small groups historically in the Judeo-Christian tradition which was followed by more input relating specific elements of Christian theology to Rogers' Therapeutic Triad. After discussing the input in small groups there was a debriefing. Before leaving the group indicated its intention by committing itself to the remaining two meetings.

The following session was primarily a workshop. The group was led by a licensed counselor into the theme of "Really Getting the Message" which dealt with levels of listening and responding. Small groups and role playing were the learning methods used. The third session began with a presentation from a successful group similar to ours telling about their experience and the value they saw in their plan. Small groups then set goals for the first month's operation.

Now between thirty and thirty-five leaders meet monthly to continue sharing experiences and for skill building. Immediately following the meal is a time of "coming together." One Sunday this was finding out from three other people two things they cared about. After this

there is training input followed by small group practicum. After reassembling and debriefing, the session ends.

Minimal commitment for becoming a Care Group leader was to accept the names of fifteen other members living near the leader. Those names were to be called every two months just to express some "caring" for those people. Beyond that minimum, the leaders have been given freedom to find whatever ways seem most appropriate and comfortable to develop a caring community in their area. In this large, fragmented congregation there has been an amazing sense of closeness generated in the four months the system has been in operation. Letters and calls come to the church office expressing feelings from gratitude to excitement over what had happened between them and other members of the congregation. Perhaps the biggest gain of all has been in the regular meeting of the leaders as they have accepted differences in themselves and in their groups which necessitate different approaches to "caring." Meeting as briefly and as seldom as they do, they have achieved a camaraderie absent in other church groups meeting on a more regular basis.

The organizing principle of this group was that it be person centered. In coming together, the actual task became the members as persons, not objects of gain. The most difficult change to bring about was the understanding that the calls the leaders were to make were not to get

money or attendance from the others. Most of the laymen involved have come to have a deep appreciation for their ability to care about people as people, some for the first time in their lives.

The discussion of this chapter has attempted to show that small groups in the church have the capacity to do what the Official Model of religious commitment cannot. Small groups have the capacity to make religious commitment a possibility for modern humanity. They can by providing the person the opportunity to encounter his/her life situation in specific ways which relate to universal themes of life. Through the small group encounter one may see oneself in relation to meanings which one formerly had not known. There may be an experiential awareness that all people are in the same "boat," a feeling of commonality and self-forgetting participation in the whole community. It is at that point that the symbolic acts of the ritual may come alive to interpret the reality the person has experienced in terms of the Christian faith. It is then possible to see religious commitment as a cosmic expression of what has happened for that person in that Community of Faith. Church groups should be able to do this more ably than other groups because of their participation in the totality of human experience, its corruption and redemption. Church groups should be aware from their heritage that ultimately all growth is a gift and a mystery which is

related to the thrust present in all life and can therefore interpret life's transcendent themes.

The starting point for making religious commitment meaningful is in the use of the small group. Renewal through this channel can have far reaching effects if understood properly. For this important reason, a closer look must be taken at groups in the Church.

GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

Humanity has always found meaningful relationships through small groups. With the rise of industrialism and the resulting collectivism, small group intimacy became even more important because personal identity was decimated. The most successful groups used certain methods, without technical understanding, which they knew from experience produced good results. In our time, which has been described before, the need for effective groups is paramount. Many have written it, but Casteel has said it best when he wrote:

The alternative to drift and despair will be found in the kind of human anchorage where persons can find security, strength and orientation for life as they live it. People need homes; and the homes of the future will be found, not in fixed systems or structures, but in clusters and nuclei of persons in relations.²⁹

Just as the Church must recognize that there are no psycho-

²⁹Casteel, op. cit., p. 26.

logical answers to the deepest dimensions of any human problems, so must it recognize that theological aptitude and good intentions do not completely compose the content for a healthy, vital group experience. There follows then, the need to relate some developments in group dynamics to the Church.

A Continuing Presence

Anderson has noted something of significance in the group of the original disciples. He wrote:

The changes in their lives indicate that the disciples who followed Jesus accepted a new belonging. They gave up their previous belongings to families, fishermen, and tax collectors as they felt an increasing identification with Jesus and with one another. Belonging to the group known as the disciples of Jesus slowly became the most significant relationship of their lives. After the events of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were left alone. The extent to which the new belonging had become all important for them became evident in the strength of their witness and in the maintenance of their common life, even against the social and religious patterns of their culture. They had changed.³⁰

This quality of relationship continued in the early years of Christianity and was at home in the "house church" which was the norm for those years rather than the novelty they are presently. The gospel message of reconciliation between God and humanity and then between person and person was an integral part of the gathered community.

³⁰Anderson, op. cit., p. 81.

Chapter three pointed out that during the next few centuries the Church became involved in the secret meaning of the "mystery" and became dependent upon it to the loss of the redemptive fellowship. Small groups or religious orders sought to recapture that same kind of community lifted up in the pages of scripture.

Perhaps the most skilled early approach to small groups was used by the Methodists. Wesley recognized the importance of a like-minded group in sustaining the assumptive world of its members. He emphasized participation in class meetings to consolidate and strengthen the new world view. They met weekly in groups of twelve under an appointed leader. Problems relating to their conversion and their future mode of life were discussed in agreed secrecy.³¹ This proved to be of great value in reaching uprooted individuals in a disintegrated society because the meetings gave meaning and stability to their lives and enabled each one to receive support from the others as he faced the business of living.

The Church did not explore what actually happened in small groups, but others did. Interest in group theory and practice goes back to the early years of this century. The main emphasis then, however, was on the thinking

³¹Frank, op. cit., p. 78.

function of the group process. Problem solving by group thinking was the goal of group process.

Religious circles began to use group procedure in the years after World War I. The focus then was on discussion groups. It was not until after World War II that current approaches sprung up under the leadership of Kurt Lewin who founded the Research Center for Group Dynamics at M.I.T. in 1944.

In the early 1950's, the National Training Laboratory was founded and the science of "group dynamics" began to be taken seriously. It was also abused and misapplied. "Group process" became a verboten word in certain circles and it always conjured up images of quick-sell gimmicks for guaranteed results. Finally in the last decade a period of maturation occurred and the small group emphasis became extremely wide spread. There are still skeptics, but the field has proven its value and wise group leaders employ its concepts and insights. In recent years, churches began employing this understanding of how groups function and often developed new forms of groups to capitalize on the opportunities discovered by students of the small group movement. Because there are so many similarities between the operation of these groups inside and outside the church, there is often the question about their place in the church. It would be helpful to identify some unique characteristics of groups in the church.

Some Unique Features

It is usually assumed that a group within the church will have some unique features which distinguish it from other groups, but sometimes a clear understanding of what these should be is lacking. Often the discussion suggests that only the structures and content which have "traditionally" been part of the church are appropriate to include within its program. The truth is that there is a vast amount of confusion among clergy and laity alike as to what the essential characteristics of a group within the church should be. It would be worthwhile if each church group were to attempt to establish a list of criteria it felt expressed that group's uniqueness.

Initially, two elements point to critical differences between a group which embodies the church's uniqueness and one which does not: structure and content.³² Ashbrook has noted that cellular units or small groups (*οίκος*) within the early church had a structure which was identified by certain characteristics which came to be known as *κοινωνία*. The content of these groups was material which was labeled *κηρυγμα* or *διδαχή*. Both structure and content were consistent in those groups, according to the reports which inform contemporary readers, both

³²Ashbrook, op. cit., pp. 23-33.

appeared together and together they became characteristic of the Christian fellowship.

The koinonia structure was characterized by personal, responsible love and recognized the intricate interrelatedness of individuals one with another and with the divine. It might be said that this structure was the embodiment of the Great Commandment, displaying that quality of love for God and humanity. It could also be said that this structure manifests the original scheme of creation, that is, the lack of estrangement and the presence of reconciliation.

Groups which offer contrast with the koinonia structure contain elements which are characterized as impersonal, irresponsible and indifferent. These structures increase the lack of unity in creation by creating opposing forces which act out of self-interest and restrict responsible encounter and participation. In doing this, reconciliation, reunion and renewal are prevented. In such a situation the Logos of Christ which is the universal structure of reality in Christian groups is absent. Two examples of this contrast in structure might be found in a women's society that has become a hotbed of gossip or a church school class that has all the earmarks of a sorority or fraternity.

The second aspect of a group which embodies the church's uniqueness is its content, so called $\kappa\eta\mu\gamma\mu\alpha$ and

διδαχή in early church groups. This content comes from the living Word of God as revealed in the Bible and all that derives from it in terms of church history, church dogmatics, and literature. The contrasting content makes no reference to God, Christ, the Church, the Bible or the Christian tradition. It is strictly this worldly in what it takes for its frame of reference.

Both content and structure which draw upon values reflected by the Biblical witness of the Christian experience must be present in a group if it is to approach an expression of the uniqueness of the Church. If only the content reflects Christianity, the effect of the group is certainly not supportive and is often crippling and destructive to the individual participants. On the other hand, if only the structure reflects the Christian position, the deepest dimension of the group is not being recognized. The group is incomplete, but beyond that it is failing to renew the life of the Church.

Several other characteristics should be visible in a group if the church is to make its unique contribution. It is only through their expression that the small group can have an effect upon religious commitment because only when specific contributions of the church are present does the group recognize its deepest dimension. Then the members are enabled to transcend themselves and their immediate situation to recognize the vertical dimension of

life in their midst. The transcendent reference is a crucial contribution of the church.

A second mark of a church group, related to the first, should be the affirmation of a higher loyalty and the recognition that this is the source of new life. As the common source of growth and discovery, the transcendent dimension enables the horizontal dimension of life to become more meaningful.

Third, spiritual growth as an explicit goal of the church should indicate that the group deals with meanings, values and other religious growth issues. Maxfield and Smith have noted:

Whenever a person is able to hammer out the truth about himself he is then free to relate himself to something of ultimate importance. First the person must devote a great deal of his effort to looking at what is going on inside himself; then he must relate the dynamics of his own experience to some ultimate concerns. When he takes what is inside and commits it to an ultimate goal which is outside, religious experience can and does occur.³³

Fourth, the church believes that the process of inreach and upreach must be applied to a life style of active outreach.³⁴ This means that the inward and upward quest has direct implications for the horizontal dimension on which human brotherhood is encountered. This recog-

³³Maxfield and Smith, op. cit., p. 46.

³⁴Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., "The Issue Is Life," a faculty lecture on the theme, "The Church In The Seventies" given on November 25, 1969. (Mimeoographed.)

nition should be the source of a conscious awareness of and response to the needs of others in the group. It deepens the sense of shared responsibility for each other. The brother-man image in itself is also a unique contribution of church groups, for in traditional psychoanalytic groups, the leader's image tends toward the traditional father image.

A fifth uniqueness is revealed by the awareness that the moving force which binds everyone together is the Holy Spirit. It is this awareness which cultivates a consciousness of the three dimensions of relationship and which as one writer expressed it, prevents "Christian communitarianism from degenerating into sociological collectivity." Along with this is the awareness that the community of faith is a gathered community, one which cannot be created by will alone. The workings of the Holy Spirit are acknowledged to have an effect and so a special awareness of "meaningful time," *καίρος*, is present which sensitizes the activity within the group.

Finally the church group has special resources to deal with universal themes of life and to relate them to the individual's experience of them in a particular way. In church groups there is a natural expression for the truth expressed in Christianity that dying precedes birth. It is possible to relate this to the Christ event and to personalize it for the individual in terms of the painful

dying of life constricting defenses and patterns of relating to give birth to more meaningful, life giving relationships.

The Function of Church Groups: A Summary

It appears that small groups in the church may have at least two effects for those who participate. They may create a "halo" effect for traditional elements or they may change or add to the emphasis of symbols used in church life.

The former possibility, the creation of a "halo" effect, may arise simply because mutual reinforcement is a self-justifying value. There may be no change or growth within the group, but the common affirmation of one another can provide the feeling that much is happening. It is doubtful that the illusion can be maintained for long and when it disappears, the emptiness will negatively affect the value a person sees in his group experience. The "halo" effect can be the result of deliberate attempts by leaders with too little integrity or not enough skill or it can arise as an unconscious spin off of a more ambitious group life. This leads to the second possibility.

The second possibility, that of changing or adding to the meaning of symbols used in church life, is the end which should be consciously sought. The use of traditional Christian symbols and symbolic acts was discussed in detail

earlier. Now they will be discussed specifically in terms of the effect small groups can have upon them.

In the course of time as humanity moved to the point where it now lives, it left a trail of inadequate concepts and systems strewn along the way. The barren, chaotic wasteland which existence has tended to become is largely so because the changes humanity has experienced have removed its link with the past. Humanity is caught between two ages as the Bible indicates. It lives free of the past, but in the expectancy of the future. Now it enjoys neither the security of past bondage nor the reward of its destiny. Present existence is sterile, with its richest depths of meaning seeking expression. This is at the heart of Christianity and it has resources to offer the situation.

Christianity, however, has been captured by a religious organization and its resources are employed as a matter of form. Because the resources and symbols of religious organization do not originally belong to the people they cannot be used by them. In a developmental sense it is correct that they should be rejected and most intellectuals and professionals have. Persons are left needing an experience in which they can develop their own symbols, symbols which belong to the individual through personal revelation. It may well be that later on one will see in culturally more wide spread symbols, such as those

of traditional Christianity, even deeper and more meaningful expressions of the object of ultimate concern than are expressed in one's own symbol system. If that happens, however, it will be because the new symbol is seen to be more expressive than the personal one, not because it has been handed one by tradition. Yet, the personal revelatory experience is the powering force and the origin of the deep expression recognized in the more generally used symbol. In fact, Clark reported, "It is quite likely that the (broader) symbol was an emotional memory of the encounter in which the revelation occurred."³⁵

For many people, the personal encounter with the deepest realities of life has never occurred or has been lost. It is because of this loss of contact with the revelatory experience that the symbol loses its power for the person. When traditional symbols are communicated in terms foreign to the experience of the person, it becomes more difficult to see them mirroring the reality of personal experience. Take the traditional theistic concept of God for instance. In general terms, it is as Clinebell wrote:

God is very dead for many people. The concept refers to no reality in their actual experience. God

³⁵James V. Clark, "Toward a Theory and Practice of Religious Experiencing," in James F. Bugental (ed.) *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 257.

can be revived for them only in relationships where theological truths become experiential realities. This can happen in growth groups.³⁶

When theological truths are experienced in the human situation, they open avenues of expression and commitment never before known, considered or desired. Growth groups contain the potential for renewing traditional Christian symbols. This brings hope and promise for the Official Model of religious commitment, because then the symbolic act is speaking for the person as a result of an experience of the reality there represented.

³⁶Clinebell, *The People Dynamic*, p. 129.

CHAPTER VI

RELATING THE OFFICIAL MODEL TO A MODERN CHRISTIAN'S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

This last chapter contains summations of some of the points developed in the course of this writing and conclusions which seem appropriate in light of the material discovered and analyzed. Its primary purpose is to suggest possible ways the Official Model of religious commitment offered by the institutional church may be related to a modern Christian's religious identity.

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AS A POSSIBILITY

One of the points attempted in this writing has been that Western humanity needs at the present time to become related to powerful and meaningful symbols. They must offer means of expressing his wholeness so that a person feels integrated and identified with the cosmos and all humanity in a deeply personal way. They must be flexible enough to allow for an expanding knowledge of the universe; they must on the other hand be strong enough to express the depths of the deepest within humanity. They must communicate a sense of relatedness.

Another point attempted has been that if the deepest desire or the greatest emptiness is to be soothed,

even addressed, the balm must rise from philosophical or theological roots. Other solutions fail to have the virtue required to bind together all the disillusionment and despair, the alienation and anomie, the disinterest and disgust, the anger and anxiety permeating man's individual and social life today. In speaking of the core of human lostness and loneliness, the alternatives of discovery, fellowship, growth, valuing, choosing, caring and other spiritual aspects bring one to the realm of the religious for these are its primary concern.

Having noted humanity's deep need for symbols and that the human condition requires their content be of a religious nature, it must be added that the symbols must be based on personal conviction arising out of an experience of that truth expressed by the symbol. There must be the conviction that somehow the symbol is a basic part of life for the person who claims it. It must speak for an experience the person has known, identified and claimed.

The damage incurred when the symbolic acts of primitive Christianity became enmeshed with the Hellenistic mysteries has already been examined. The act of associating the mystery of the ritual with the magic of the supernatural turned the symbols away from their purpose. By the time the symbolic acts came to be known as sacraments, they had ceased to speak of an experience in the

life of that person and had become agents to bring about the experience itself.

The Protestant Reformation denied that salvation could be won without the involvement of the person in total belief. Claims that the mere performance of the rite affected the recipient's salvation were recognized as misrepresentation of the biblical truth. Neither Luther nor Calvin accepted the idea that the sacraments could be separated from the act of believing. It was the conviction that arose in the life of the believer as a result of his experience of the truth represented by the symbol, which gave power to the act so that it affected his life.

This is not to deny the power of the ritual, however. It was in part because the power of the symbol to express, to move, was recognized that the symbol and symbolic acts were incorporated into a ritual. It was realized that its power to move, to speak, carried a tremendous impact upon the persons involved. The very act of participating in the ritual gives psychic relief to those for whom the symbols and acts were alive and meaningful. The value of formal ritual for those who claim the symbols has long been recognized.

Not only is there value in ritual in terms of psychic relief, but also in terms of organizing the parts of a person for unified direction and action. "Rituals and symbols of personal commitment and group commitment are

necessary if habits, impulses, sensitivities, focus of attention and all the resources of personality are to be organized and directed (toward the chosen goal)."¹ One could go beyond even that to say that it is impossible to be faithful to anything unless one practices the rituals and symbols of commitment which have become formalized.

At the same time however, as the ritual becomes set, it may easily become over-formalized and inflexible and in this event its function would be to restrict rather than to promote the expansion of life. This is the current situation with respect to the ritual of religious commitment. The suggestion made in this writing is that it is possible to carry on constant adaptation in order to extend ancient symbolic forms so that they may continue to deeply affect large segments of humanity. This suggestion assumes the Jungian contention that certain archetypal forms correspond so harmoniously with the very structure of human life that it is highly unlikely they could ever be superceded.

It is further suggested that these archetypal symbols can become regimented so that they become impotent. They lose their power where people do not understand the necessity of bringing the forms or symbols together in the

¹Henry Nelson Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 172.

context of living personal relationships. Where the symbols and rituals are not experienced as a vital part of community life, they lose their place on a social and personal level and begin to assume form and meaning as a matter of function and not of experience. Bouyer has written that "no Christian event or Christian rite can become an object of faith independently of the living Word which gives it its meaning."² Only the Christian event or Christian rite which is experienced through the living Word in relationships can be a part of the faith of the believer. The following paragraphs examine how symbols come alive through relationships in a small group experience.

Through involvement in small group interaction one is able to enter into the process of self-disclosure by personal efforts to share and relate, but also through the encounter and challenge of others to areas which are not part of one's conscious awareness. Small groups having a climate of trust and acceptance make it possible not only to honestly discuss, but to openly experience the human predicament of alienation and estrangement. Frequently one's alienation occurs at such a depth that he/she is not able to recognize it. Furthermore, humanity is self-deceptive to the degree that it often becomes totally

²Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 208.

unaware of its self-deception. Anxieties and guilt may be locked up inside the body in an effort to avoid them by denying their existence. In psychology this process is identified as repression. Members of a group can help themselves become aware of their personal estrangement from each other.

The Judeo-Christian understanding of man accurately approaches and analyzes the dynamics of the defenses used by humanity in its process of self-deception. Its view of the radical dimension of human alienation from self, others and the ground of all life is at the core of its message. It expresses the human loss of the capacity for open experiencing and the separation from the deeper levels of life in the vivid imagery of the fall of man, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and consequent loss of access to the tree of life. The biblical record of God's self-disclosure to humanity shows that the only real way to bring the processes of denial and avoidance to light is through a climate of trust and acceptance in which confrontation takes place.

A basic ontological assumption of the Christian position is that being itself is trustworthy and it characterizes the ground of being, God, as a trustworthy force seeking to draw humanity into relationship with the true nature of its being. The ultimate and most profound self-disclosure of the trustworthiness and acceptance of

God, for Christianity, became known in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of human hope. The koinonia fellowship in the early Christian community following the disclosure reflected the dimension and quality of life in which God calls humanity to participate.

The same ontological assumption of the trustworthiness of being is present in the small group experience. It is present either explicitly or implicitly. The possibility of redemption is present too, just as is the belief that to attain it, one must become a participant in and be able to reflect the nature of trustworthiness and acceptance. Groups which claim and identify with the Christian expression of this human experience have more adequate resources to recognize and express this process as it occurs. The symbols and symbolic acts of early Christianity arose out of the experience of this type of relationship as they experienced it in the nature of Christ.

As the small group experience mirrors this same type of relationship, it brings its participants alive to their own human predicament and that of others. It is impossible to express the deeper understanding and feelings which surface. The symbols and symbolic acts of Christianity offer additional means of expressing the profound discoveries of the group. They also provide a means of expressing the resolution of the human predicament.

The symbols actually come alive in two ways. First they serve as vehicles to carry the human experience beyond the limits of its verbal and logical expression. They create images which speak the truth by the nature of their relationship to life experience. Secondly, the symbols come alive as, for the persons involved, they become the message in true McLuhan style. More than a communicator they become the communication. The figure of Christ not only brought a message, he was the message. The idea of symbol as event is carried to various degrees within Christianity, but to whatever extent, it represents growth toward a fuller humanity as one relates oneself to that dimension of life.

The crucial key then, it seems, is to keep the symbols and acts associated with the events and meanings of personal relationships. For Christianity, this has historically occurred through the koinonia of the gathered community. Recognizing that this is a necessity in the present as well, if the symbols are to have meaning, a means of relating them to personal relationships is needed.

Having looked at the accomplishments of the organized structure of the church throughout this writing, it has been seen that it has not managed this task in the current situation. It has not been able to provide for the growth of most of the members or the sustenance of Christian symbols and rituals. It has been unable to

largely because they have not been part of its group life on a personal level, but rather formal rites having little carry-over beyond their enactment. It was with all these things in mind that the writer has concluded that small groups which enable deep personal relationships as a part of the intentional community is perhaps the most likely alternative for the organized church to take in its quest for a continued existence as a meaningful institution.

TOWARD A MODERN CHRISTIAN'S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

One of the contributions this writing has attempted to make has been in the area of personal relationships. It has worked to bring about a clearer understanding of the role of relationships in human life. More specifically it has sought to emphasize what Clinebell meant when he wrote:

In the small, sharing group lies the power which enables persons to love more fully and live more creatively. This is the people dynamic, the power we have to recreate each other and ourselves through caring and sharing. Growth groups offer a means of releasing the people dynamic to help humanize personal relationships and to help create a world in which every person will have the opportunity to develop his full unique capacities.³

It has sought to show that in local congregations, personal relationships assisted by small group interaction can

³Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *The People Dynamic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. viii.

release a stream of helpful love in the people's life together. They can allow a church to become an increasing force in individual lives and in the life of the community by stimulating growth toward wholeness.

When the symbols of the church are surrounded by deep personal relationships which allow for the experience of some of the major themes of life, the church will be a sphere within which people are caught up in a new understanding of the three levels of relationship. Then God in human life becomes part of daily experience.

Reflecting upon various ways writers have explained their understanding of God, one must come to believe in humanity. Tillich's emphasis of probing the depths of one's own existence until the ground of being is discovered is one approach.⁴ Another emphasis found in many writers, but Buber especially, stresses how God presents himself through the other. He wrote, "It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self is passed."⁵ These ideas raised by theologians give a radical dimension to what happens in personal relationships. They explain the power source in what Wieman has called "creative interchange." It is enough to support Robinson's claim that

⁴Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 57.

⁵Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 71.

"Christianity is humanism within a mystery," and that, as he wrote:

God, the unconditional, is to be found only in, with and under the conditioned relationships of this life: for he is their depth and ultimate significance.⁶

Christianity makes it possible to believe in humanity not denying its limitations, but affirming the mystery of its being. Christianity makes it possible to believe in humanity because God became human and through the mystery of the incarnation revealed and brought to light the divine possibilities of all humankind.

It is with this background that the following principles are suggested as a beginning for a modern Christian's religious identity.

First, the basic human drive is "meaning." It is not enough to call it self-preservation, sex, pleasure or other human drive for they are bound up in the larger context. Frankl perhaps identified it best in his experiences in a concentration camp. His published insights, serving as a basis for his system of Logotherapy, delineate the depth of this need for mankind. Research for this writing supports this principle and indicates that many of the personal and social problems of Western culture will be

⁶John A. T. Robinson, *Honest To God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 60.

controlled when some means for reintroducing meaning into the lives of millions is found.

Second, a person's meaning and purpose in life comes primarily from his relationship with his fellows. Vital relationships offer the "why" of living, the reason for being. Or in another way, a person's life begins to lose meaning, purpose and direction when he becomes estranged from his/her fellows.

A major thrust of the human life is to overcome the sense of separateness or "over-againstness" which gives rise to the uncomfortable feelings of insecurity and isolation. The object is to find each other in fulfilling relationships which fill the emptiness with the warmth of acceptance and understanding. The deepest desire a person may have is to be at one with someone, to have someone with whom one can be at one and to have someone who can help find at-one-ness with everything else.

Paradoxically, preoccupation with these personal needs causes one to turn inward and to have little concern to share with others what he/she feels the most. That is why one needs to be encountered and to encounter in turn. This is the source of reconciliation which brings the at-one-ness that is so badly wanted and needed.

Third, to be able to have a true and productive relationship with others one must come to know oneself. It has been learned that one's self is discovered in the

process of being disclosed to significant others.⁷ The process of talking and sharing with others helps one understand who he/she is and what he/she thinks and feels. The feedback others are able to give sharpens one's own perspective. Knowing oneself on a very deep level at some point requires knowing others on that same level of interaction.

Fourth and finally, it is important that vehicles be available to convey the depths of meaning which come into being in the interaction between people. It is also necessary for there to be community wide symbols which express the common experience of its members. This must include their experience with one another and with outsiders. Not only must there be expression of their common individual experience, but there must be a means of expressing the community's collective experience in relation to space and time. Necessary are word symbols, symbolic objects, symbolic acts and rituals. By its very nature, this system will operate on a conscious level, but move to a deeper level periodically to contain the deeper levels of human experience.

These four principles, arising out of this writing, form the basis for a modern Christian's religious identity.

⁷Otis E. Young, "A Reorientation to All of Life," *Pastoral Psychology*, XVIII:172 (March 1967), 26.

Research and analysis of the human condition indicates that these principles are operant at this time.

RENEWED DIMENSIONS FOR RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

The Christian Church, when it effectively offers encounter with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, serves as an effective agent of reconciliation, bringing together the fragments of modern humanity. In its theology, God, the source of all life, unity and growth became a person who came to earth in answer to the deepest human needs. Jesus revealed the source of the at-one-ness which is sought by humanity. It is within the midst of human life that the Living Word can become manifest.

A Koinonia group or some similar prayer, study or discussion group is often the first exposure for many to a close personal relationship even faintly resembling that described in the New Testament.⁸ Small groups of the type discussed in this writing, acknowledging their Christian identity are perhaps the best place for a person to encounter the at-one-ment he seeks in life. By encountering the deepest experiences of life within a community which interprets these experiences in terms of their universal meaning, the available symbol system can be

⁸Robert A. Raines, *Reshaping the Christian Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 29.

understood and accepted as one's own. Through his experience of the deep themes of life and their interpretation in the community, a person may develop a mature understanding of and expression of life and its relationships.

Evidence has indicated that the structure of the church in twentieth century Western culture has failed and continues to fail in providing the kinds of growth producing relationships which enable persons to find the symbol system it offers of much assistance. Generally, it has been seen that the lack of a sense of community within the church prompts this situation. The context of the Official Model of religious commitment must be changed if religious commitment is to be a possibility for modern Christians. Many, at this point who identify themselves as Christians see no value in religious commitment or the institution which continues and preserves those forms.

If the church as a religious institution is to be of value, it must recognize changing forms of authority and admit that it has none except that which a few grant it in their own personal lives. The new relationship with authority emerging at this time affects all types and locations of commitments. Attributive authority, on which the church has long depended, is being replaced by an authority of confidence which grows out of recognized value. There has also emerged an authority of competence. Skill is recognized and affirmed. Those today without

either confidence or competence have little authority. If the Church's authoritative Word is to be heard, it must be heard as a source instilling confidence and displaying competence in its ability to deal with human affairs.

Developing and utilizing skills in relationships is one likely place for the Church to begin recovering from the losses it has experienced for several years. Concentration on the restoration of a true community through the use of small groups would have reactions in every area of the church's work. Maves wrote:

We now see more clearly than before that preaching, teaching, pastoral work, and social action are enhanced and reinforced in their effectiveness when carried on in the context of a redemptive fellowship. To put it negatively, preaching, teaching or counseling which either ignores or is unaware of the pull of social forces upon persons is doomed to ineffectuality or to failure because it does not truly understand the nature of man.⁹

Already a suggestion was made in the last chapter that conducting the confirmation class on a growth group format is one point of departure. More must be done. Some of the intimacy and informality of the sect type religious group must be captured for more highly organized and established churches.

In addition to special groups to deal with unexpected crises and the changes accompanying develop-

⁹Paul D. Maves, *The Church and Mental Health* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 77.

mental stages, the ongoing groups within the structure must be person and need centered rather than exclusively task centered. They must adopt some of the honesty of expression and caring found in many Alcoholics Anonymous fellowships. Their organization should be on a basis of personal needs and natural affinities rather than upon the basis of a convenient statistical category.

One further point might be made in the discussion of renewed dimensions of religious commitment. Dillistone has noted that ". . . probably in modern society the most widely used means of commitment is simply the personal registration of the name."¹⁰ It might well be that this public act in the process of entering the community would serve as a means of initiating a new process of inter-communication. The new member's name is definitely and decisively committed to a new social environment. The name, symbol of his personal identity, has become part of the life-in-relationship in which the new society exists.

At the Church of the Savior in Washington D. C., one week in October of each year members affirm anew that they belong to Christ and that they belong to one another. The period before recommitment is a time of re-examination, a time when they decide what their most basic belonging

¹⁰F. W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Symbolism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 298.

means after another year of pilgrimage. "It is a time of pain and of healing, a special season in which with brutal honesty we examine our original commitment to Christ."¹¹ Then throughout that week the members come to the chapel and after a time of meditation, kneel and inscribe their names on the membership role of the church again.

A goal of this type of involvement is to free the member of the illusion that has been created that one is to be passive and dependent. Creating a new awareness of self and a deeper understanding of the church can involve the member meaningfully in the service of pastoral care. When following the Official Model's acts of religious commitment that lead to church membership is seen as an initiatory rite of transcendent meaning leading to membership in a redemptive fellowship, the participant is involved in more than superficial acticity. One experiences belonging to others and others to him/her. The accompanying responsibility would create an awareness of Christian vocation which could be expressed in various ways.

A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHOICE

A benefit to be had by this active approach to

¹¹Elizabeth O'Conner, "An Approach To Integrity of Church Membership," *Review and Expositor*, LX:2 (Spring 1963), 202.

religious commitment through church membership is the possibility that the priesthood of all believers might be understood in a fuller way. Not only might every person recognize the necessity of being his/her own priest, but each might realize that every person must be a priest to every other person. In this way individuals accept responsibility for the personhood and spiritual life of one another. Ministry becomes the Christian vocation and pastoral care is the expression of it. Reid has written:

To speak of fellow Christians sharing support, love, acceptance, recognition, reassurance, and fellowship is to speak of pastoral care. Pastoral care is the responsibility of every Christian and while some have special gifts for this ministry, small groups can call forth a unique level of mutual pastoral care. The ordained clergyman has no special magic that makes him the only true bearer of these gifts; they belong to all of us to some degree. In fact, he is often less sensitive to persons than many of his parishioners. And so the ministry of pastoral care also belongs to all of us.¹²

Revealing the level of need near churches was a comment made by one of the ministers in a church surveyed for this writing.¹³ He reported that in forty families which have children attending the pre-school in their church, there was not one which sociology could identify as a "standard family." Not one in which the family

¹²Clyde Reid, "Pastoral Care Through Small Groups," *Pastoral Psychology*, XVIII:172 (March 1967), 18.

¹³Statement made by Dr. Colin Zavits in an address to care group leaders at the Wilshire United Methodist Church, October 8, 1972.

constellation included both parents present and grandparents near enough to visit regularly. The number of unmet needs present indicated by this situation must be tremendous.

A professional staff physically cannot relate to this situation. Here the small group as caring fellowship may be instrumental in forwarding the legitimate pastoral care role of the laity in two ways. First, the small group may be the context in which lay members experience the reality of caring by others and in which they communicate care in return. Second, the small group may be a point for training laity for their pastoral care role.¹⁴

Dealing with the issue of the possibility of religious commitment raised in the opening chapter has covered many subjects. After extensive reading, research and discussion, the writer is convinced that for many of those alienated from the church there is a possibility for religious commitment to be a meaningful experience for them. Much of their alienation and the estrangement within the active membership comes from not having been introduced to a redemptive fellowship. In the redemptive fellowship the objects and actions of organized religion do more than point beyond this world. As Robinson wrote, "Liturgy is not, for the Christian, a 'religious' rite but the procla-

¹⁴Reid, op. cit., p. 17.

mation, the acknowledgment, the reception, the adoration of the holy in, with and under the common."¹⁵ When religious activities express human experience and relate it to a reality beyond ordinary human life they accomplish their purpose.

Small groups within the church appear to be perhaps the best vehicle to restore the possibility of experiencing Christianity's depth in terms of one's immediate life situation. Concerned laymen and clergy together must express their concern in ways which make it possible for these life giving relationships to exist within the local congregation.

¹⁵Robinson, op. cit., p. 88.

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APPENDICES

A. LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Wilshire United Methodist Church

711 SOUTH PLYMOUTH BOULEVARD

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90005

Phone: 213 931-1085

MANDALL C. PHILLIPS, D.D.
Minister

J. E. HENRICKS, D.D.
Associate Minister

L. C. BROOKS
Associate Minister

R. C. Brooks
735 S. Plymouth Blvd.
Los Angeles, 90005

November 27, 1972

Dear Member of the Mid-Wilshire Parish,

You have recently joined a church in the Mid-Wilshire Parish. This puts you in a group which can provide helpful information by completing the enclosed survey.

The survey originated as part of a dissertation study I am making for the Doctor of Religion degree at the Southern California School of Theology at Claremont. As you can see by the title of the survey, I am concerned with the part small groups play in the program of the parish churches. By consulting the church to which you belong I have secured your address and permission to contact you.

Your response will provide information I need for the dissertation. In addition, the findings will provide suggestions for the program of the churches of the parish. There is no need for your response to be identified with you personally, so your particular answers will in no way be known by myself or the staff of the church.

Frank answers will provide the best information so I encourage that type of response. A rapid response will also be helpful. The small amount of time that each of you can contribute is essential for the success of the total project.

I sincerely appreciate your cooperation.

Yours truly,

R. C. Brooks

B. A SURVEY OF THE ROLE OF SMALL GROUPS IN
THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH MEMBER

A SURVEY OF THE ROLE OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH MEMBER

INSTRUCTIONS

This survey can be completed in a short time. Do not plan to take a great deal of time for it. If you are not active in a small group within the church, you should omit questions 19-29. If you are active in more than one group, choose the one which is most significant for you and think about it as you answer this questionnaire. Depending on the question, you should circle a response or fill in the blank.

9. If involved in more than one small group in this church indicate the number here _____.

10. List memberships in business, social or fraternal groups outside the church _____

11. Level of involvement in this church in comparison to previous church memberships. (much greater, more, same, less, much less)

12. I (was, was not) involved in a small group in this church before becoming a member.

13. Of my five closest friends, ___ are members of this church.

14. The most influential factor causing my membership to be placed here was

a. friends	d. the minister
b. the location	e. being raised in this church
c. small group involvement	f. other _____

15. I joined this church by transfer, confirmation, profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith or other
_____.

16. I was prepared for membership in this church (individually or in a group).
If in a group:
a. I met with this group ___ times in becoming a member.
b. I feel that I know people who I met in this group better than other members I have since met. yes no
c. I would characterize this group as primarily (teacher centered; people in dialogue; other _____.
d. For me the class was a (formality serving primarily as a process by which to become a member; meaningful experience having positive results in my life).

17. In the process of becoming a member, I feel a particular group extended me an invitation to join. yes no

18. Placing my membership and participating in Sunday morning worship satisfies my need to express a commitment by involvement in the church. yes no

19. In the small group to which I belong I am (seldom involved; occasionally involved; heavily involved).
20. The purpose(s) of the group in which I participate is
- a. to operate the church property
 - b. to operate the church program
 - c. to share feelings and ideas
 - d. to study and learn together
 - e. to encourage spiritual growth
 - f. other _____
 - g. to implement the church's mission outside our local structure
 - h. to deal with social issues which concern me
 - i. to give fellowship and mutual support
21. My membership in this group seems best described as
- a. an expectation
 - b. an opportunity
 - c. a burden
 - d. a privilege
 - e. a demand
 - f. other _____
22. The group meets
- a. weekly
 - b. bi-weekly
 - c. monthly
 - d. quarterly
 - e. other _____
23. The group is led by
- a. an elected leader
 - b. the minister
 - c. an appointed leader
 - d. various members
 - e. no leader
 - f. other _____
24. Circle the ways in which the group promotes growth of individual members:
- a. supports differences of opinion
 - b. places responsibility for the group leadership on individual participants
 - c. encourages self examination
 - d. encourages individuals to form questions of their own
 - e. expresses love and concern for them
 - f. none of the above
 - g. other _____

25. Circle the ways in which the group discourages growth of individual members:
- a. leader dominates
 - b. conformity (consensus) is encouraged
 - c. disagreement is considered unhealthy
 - d. confrontation among members is avoided or hidden
 - e. fails to express love and concern for members
 - f. none of the above
 - g. other _____
26. If I had the power, there are some changes I would make in the group's functioning. yes no (if yes, circle choices below)
- a. more discussion
 - b. less discussion
 - c. more meetings
 - d. fewer meetings
 - e. longer meetings
 - f. shorter meetings
 - g. larger group
 - h. smaller group
 - i. different material
 - j. different leader
 - k. new form of meeting
 - l. other _____
27. My small group involvement in the church has caused me to:
- a. disrupt my involvement with the total congregation
 - b. wonder what "Christian" really means
 - c. question whether the group should be in the church
 - d. have hope for the future of the church when before I had little
 - e. value relationships found there more than in the church at large
 - f. become more active in the total church
 - g. become more regular in participating in the total congregation
28. Membership in a small group within the church (has, has not) significantly affected my understanding of Christian commitment.
29. My small group involvement in the church:
- a. is pleasant but really doesn't affect the way I live
 - b. affects my life more than my other involvements at the church
 - c. is less helpful than other small groups to which I belong
 - d. is more helpful to me than other groups to which I belong
 - e. other _____

30. To express a Christian commitment, one must be a member of a church. yes no
31. A verbal commitment (vow) is necessary before an action can be really Christian. yes no
32. I find that my church involvement (assists, does not assist) me in experiencing and understanding the values which I have chosen for my life.
33. The part of the church which allows me best expression of my Christian commitment is:
 - a. the coffee hour
 - b. the worship service
 - c. a task force
 - d. a sharing group
 - e. a personal responsibility I have taken
 - f. rituals in which I participate
34. The situation in which I have felt my commitment to Christianity most strongly was:
 - a. during the ritual of joining the church
 - b. a personal private experience before I joined the church
 - c. an experience occurring because of my participation in a small group at church
 - d. as I sang a song in the worship service
 - e. as I listened to the sermon
 - f. other _____
35. Circle what for you is the most important offering of the church:
 - a. spiritual guidance
 - b. a place for marriages and funerals within the family
 - c. deep and meaningful relationships with other people
 - d. help in making decisions about issues of our time
 - e. knowledge of God
 - f. other _____

Please share comments you would like to make which were not expressed in the questionnaire in the space below. Additional comments are welcomed.

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